DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 431 091 CE 078 743

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TITLE	Continuing Education in the Research Assessment Exercise 1996: Problems and Prospects for Strategic Development. Proceedings of the UACE Seminar in the Joint SCUTREA/SRHE/UACE Research Seminar Series (London, England, March 25, 1997). Occasional Paper No. 21.
INSTITUTION	Universities Association for Continuing Education, Cambridge (England).
ISBN	ISBN-0-0903508-125
PUB DATE	1997-12-00
NOTE	70p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Universities Association for Continuing Education, University of Cambridge Board of Continuing Education, Madingley Hall, Cambridge, CB3 8AQ, England, United Kingdom (3 British pounds plus postage and packing).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Continuing Education; *Educational Research; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Lifelong Learning; Peer Evaluation; Research Needs; Research Problems; *Research Utilization; Strategic Planning; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Research Quality; *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This document contains 10 papers from the research assessment exercise (RAE) that four organizations concerned with continuing education in the United Kingdom conducted to evaluate the quality and impact of research on continuing education in 1996. (The organizations were as follows: Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults [SCUTREA], Society for Research in Higher Education [SRHE], Universities Association for Continuing Education [UACE], and Forum for the Advancement of Continuing Education [FACE].) The following papers are included: "Introduction" (Elisabeth Gerver); "Reflections on Research Assessment" (Tony Edwards); "From Uneasy Bedfellows to Willing Partners: Continuing Education in the Research Assessment Exercises 1992-96" (Elisabeth Gerver); "Research Output and Research Cultures: Issues of Assessment and Value" (John Field); "Is Research Quality Measurable? Reflections on the Implications of the Research Assessment for Continuing Education" (Maria Slowey); "Lessons to Be Learned and Implications for Future Strategies: Report from the Group Led by Pat Davies" (Paul Armstrong); "Lessons to Be Learned and Implications for Future Strategies: Report from the Group Led by Alex Withnall" (Gareth Parry); "Lessons to Be Learned and Implications for Future Strategies: Report from the Group Led by Roger Fieldhouse" (Julia Preece); "Lessons to Be Learned and Implications for Future Strategies: Report from the Group Led by Miriam Zukas" (Alistair Thomson); and "Conclusion" (David Watson). Appended are the following: seminar program; education panel report on the 1996 RAE; experience of the subpanel on continuing education during the 1996 RAE; assessment criteria and working methods of the education panel; outcome of the 1996 RAE; and list of assessment panel members. (MN)

ED 431 091

UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION for *Continuing Education*

Occasional Paper No. 21

CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1996: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Proceedings of the UACE seminar in the joint SCUTREA/SRHE/UACE research seminar series, 25 March 1997

Edited by Professor Elisabeth Gerver

DECEMBER 1997

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Foreword

David Watson

The seminar on which this publication is based took place under the auspices of the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA), Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE), Universities Association for Continuing Education (UACE) and Forum for the Advancement of Continuing Education (FACE) in March 1997. It was an event at least as much about looking forward as looking back.

The looking back involved a dispassionate and self-critical account of how persuasive the body of work defined as Continuing Education had proved to be in the 1996 research assessment exercise (RAE). The participants avoided the most obvious trap: that of shooting the messenger. They also showed a refreshingly mature understanding of the rules of a sometimes bizarre test, such as the complex relationship between quality ratings and subsequent decisions about funding. We were perhaps less successful in eschewing the trap of counter-factual gamesmanship (what would have happened if we had acted differently?).

The looking forward involved using the lessons from this latest, authoritative exercise in peer review to identify how to maintain and increase a body of research work which has genuine impact: impact on our understanding of the objectives of continuing education; impact on our knowledge of what works and what does not work; and above all impact on future policy and practice. The continuing education community's capacity for self-critical reflection is not in doubt. As Tom Schuller reported to the UACE seminar 'From Continuing Education to Lifelong Learning' in September 1996:

> *I do not have the impression that CE research has had much impact beyond the CE community itself. Even there, there does not seem to me to be much evidence that research has influenced action or thinking very directly.*

The other critical context for the seminar was, of course, that of 'waiting for Dearing'. The participants all recognised how continuing education in UK higher education has a real chance to catch the wave of systematic support for lifelong learning, as well as the potential contribution to this process of a strong and confident research voice.

In addition to the significant contributions made by keynote speakers, whose papers are repeated here, and those recorded in discussion groups, special credit should be given to the convenor, Professor Elisabeth Gerver, convenor of the UACE research sub-committee for her vision in designing the event and then her energy and commitment in ensuring that it happened. Elisabeth was also given sterling support by her colleagues from the University of Dundee, Claire Kelly and Lynne Elder.

Introduction

Elisabeth Gerver

Context

The 1996 research assessment exercise took place against a background of perceptions that its predecessor in 1992 had improved research but produced a negative effect on teaching (HEFCE 1997, 1.2). The 1992 exercise was perceived as improving the strategic development and management of research, while increasing stress, decreasing collegiality and tending towards short-termism (*ibid*).

In the continuing education community, the perception of continuing education research in the 1992 exercise was even more fraught. Duke (1994) believed that the outcome was 'fudged, messy and from all points of view essentially unsatisfactory' (12); 'all in all the 1992 RAE did nothing for either the reputation or the resourcing of CE' (op cit, 16). Another member of the adjunct panel, Percy (1994, 21) commented that:

> *The experience of the 1992 Research Assessment Exercise does not leave one with any grounds for complacency about the state of Continuing Education Research in the universities of the United Kingdom. There are relatively few active researchers; not many of them compete successfully for research grants from significant grant-giving bodies such as the ESRC; there are hardly any full time research students; it is difficult to think of many research-based British publications in Continuing Education which will continue to be cited in, say, ten years time; there are few research groups or research teams in Continuing Education which can be identified as building up an expertise and a reputation in a particular area. British Continuing Education practice is scarcely touched by researchers; it is largely atheoretical. On the evidence before the Education Panel in the 1992 Exercise, Continuing Education research ... showed up badly when placed alongside school-based educational research.*

Because of the arrangements for assessing continuing education research in 1992, little quantitative information is available about what was assessed. Almost the only published information is Gerver's (1994) statement that only 8 out of the 86 submissions were reckoned to contain more than 10% continuing education research. No separate research ratings were published for continuing education, nor was any formal report published on the experience of the continuing education adjunct panel.

Those of us asked to assess continuing education research in the 1996 exercise were therefore understandably anxious! Nevertheless, it appears as if the situation had substantially changed by the 1996 exercise. In 47 out of 104 institutional submissions in 1996, at least 10% of the publications cited were in continuing education. The total of 1420 publications considered by the Continuing Education Sub Panel represented 12% of all publications submitted under Education, while, in the ratings, two out of the seven identified flagged sub-areas were in continuing education. Although the final ratings from the Continuing Education Sub Panel remain confidential, Field (1997) has noted

that 'in almost all cases, the PCET grading was either identical to or within one point of the main Panel's overall assessment.' The Continuing Education Sub Panel concluded that 'the 1996 RAE confirmed that continuing education - broadly defined as covering most of post compulsory education and training - is an important and large area of activity' (Gerver 1997, 19).

Why has there been such a dramatic change in perceptions of the importance of continuing education research? One explanation may lie in the definitions used. In 1992, no formal definition of continuing education was adopted. In 1996, continuing education was defined pragmatically as including most of post compulsory education and training (*op cit*, 16).

This wide definition of continuing education reflected the substantial changes of emphases in the field since 1992. Field and Taylor (1995, 254) have suggested that 'dominant themes are somewhat hard to identify' across continuing education research in Britain. However, the publications arising from the Universities Funding Council's continuing education research grants, as listed in Duke (1996), are predominantly in the areas of adults in higher education and continuing professional development and training. A Scottish 1996 survey also found that the most common topic of funded research into adult learning is access to, and participation in, higher education (Gerver 1998).

These indicators of a shift towards a wider concept of continuing education are supported by evidence from the exercise itself. Institutional submissions in 1996 mentioned post compulsory education (22 times) far more than adult or continuing education (9 times). Analysing the fields of enquiry of the 1996 Education submissions, Bassey and Constable (1997, 7) classify 217 publications as being in adult continuing or lifelong education, but an additional 355 in higher education, other professions' education, further education and post compulsory education.

This change in the conceptualisation of continuing education occurs in the context of what Scott (1995, 140-152) has described as the explosion of knowledge and of knowledge-creating institutions, combined with demands for individual and organisational reflexivity, in late modern society; one facet of these phenomena has been the growing numbers of adults attending further and higher education, and taking part in continuing professional development.

Adult and continuing education has therefore become an integral part of the wider concept of post compulsory education and training. Such a development provides an important part of the context for this seminar, in which members of the Education Panel and the Continuing Education Sub Panel reflected on the problems of the exercise and the prospects for future strategic development.

Emergent themes in seminar papers

Tony Edwards' 'Reflections on research assessment' emphasises the importance of lively, collegial research cultures rather than top down directives. Recognising the wide diversity of practices in continuing education research, he notes the broadening of the category of continuing education research and the lessening domination of educational research by a school-based culture. Most importantly, he urges us to think more seriously about what research is worth doing and why.

My own paper on 'From uneasy bedfellows to willing partners: continuing education in the research assessment exercises 1992-96' also notes the increasing compatibility of continuing education and educational research. It suggests that since 1992 continuing education research has been characterised by the emergence of more explicitly managed research environments; more continuing education research and funding for such research, with major players beginning to emerge; and increased emphasis on the impact of research. Looking ahead to the next assessment exercise, I suggest that we shall see the increased development of clusters of research expertise, a strengthening of alliances with educational research, the building of theory in post compulsory education and training, and work to establish evidence of the impact of research.

In his 'Research output and research cultures: issues of assessment and value', John Field focuses on the use of qualitative evidence to assess research cultures and the lessons to be learned for the better management of research. He challenges us to ask how much any one work really matters, how much it actually adds to our knowledge of post compulsory education and training and how it compares with the best continuing education research elsewhere. He urges us to review our concept of the relationship between theory and practice, to consider the relationship between continuing education and education as a whole in the context of the learning society, and to rejuvenate the research community.

Asking 'Is research quality measurable?', Maria Slowey reflects on the diversity of the institutional submissions. She considers three main facets of her question: the resource implications, the multiple goals of continuing education researchers, and the nature of scholarship in continuing education. She focuses on the multidisciplinary nature of continuing education research, with its view of knowledge as dynamic, requiring interaction and constant feedback. The challenge, as she presents it, is how to assess quality in such innovative research linked to practice.

The first of the reports of the discussion groups, by Pat Davies and Paul Armstrong, calls for a clearer definition of continuing education research as determined by the field itself. It presents a need for the next panel to be more representative, to identify the precise meaning of excellence, and to find a way of ascertaining impact.

Alex Withnall and Gareth Parry's report also emphasises the need for clarity about the nature of continuing education research, but sees it as integrated with the field of education in general. It calls for more attention to be paid to the impact of research and for better understanding of how different journals construct their academic and professional territories.

In their report, Roger Fieldhouse and Julia Preece reinforce demands for greater clarity in defining continuing education research and note the lack of a definition of excellence in the exercise. They ask important questions about the future political context and ponder future tactics.

Miriam Zukas and Alistair Thomson's report notes the need to define excellence, to recognise the interdisciplinary nature of continuing education research, and to take account of lifelong learning as part of an overall framework of educational research. They call on UACE to investigate the outcome of RAE-based funding, to encourage cross-fertilisation, and to spread awareness of research across its structures.

For background documentation, the appendices consist of the programme and list of contributors; reports on procedures by the Education Panel and the Continuing Education Sub Panel; the Education Panel's announcement of its criteria and procedures; and relevant material from the higher education funding councils about their definition of the field of education, their interpretation of the ratings, their definition of the rating scale and the final print out of the ratings themselves.

Constructing the future

In collaboration with SRHE and SCUTREA, UACE has already identified two immediate issues of pressing concern for the next research assessment exercise: the nature of the impact of continuing education research and the policies of the major journals. Each topic will form the basis of the 1997-8 joint research seminar series. Other major issues, which UACE will want to reflect on in its preparation for the next exercise, include re-conceptualising continuing education research (particularly moving beyond self reference) and developing more effective methods of assessing interdisciplinary work.

But it is also essential that we should look more broadly at the assumptions underlying the exercise itself. For instance, why should future exercises continue to have a purely summative character, when institutions themselves seek systematic and informed comment on their performance? In nearly all other countries, the evaluation of institutions is formative and developmental, rather than purely summative, although nearly all of them have some selectivity in research funding (HEFCE 1997, 11).

Finally, we need to think seriously about how, as researchers in the field of post compulsory education and training, we can move from predominantly practitioner-oriented research, embedded in local concerns, to more generic theory building. Our task here has promising beginnings. The first results of the initial projects funded through the ESRC's Learning Society programme will shortly begin to emerge. Useful foundations have also been established through overviews of the development of the field as a whole in the UK (Field and Taylor 1995) and Europe (Rubenson 1995). In this emergent construction of the field, I hope that we shall become part of the world of European educational researchers - even if we do not yet share their currency!

Acknowledgements

As well as the acknowledgements made in the foreword, I should like warmly to thank Professor David Watson for his many practical suggestions about the day and his own illuminating contributions to our discussion; Professor Richard Taylor, unfortunately unable to join us on the day itself, who has been consistently helpful throughout the planning both of the event and the production of this report; and Mrs Jean Brownridge, who has put the final touches to the production. I should particularly like to thank the UACE Research Sub Committee, who were primarily responsible for everything that went right on the day (but certainly not responsible for the erratic rail journeys which almost wrecked the arrangements). It has been a pleasure to work with all of them, as well as with all those mentioned by David; my warmest gratitude to them all.

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Reflections on research assessment

Tony Edwards

As the Education panel was beginning its work, it was sent on its way by Saville Kushner (1996) (University of Anglia) with an attack on the assessment process as secretive, ethically unregulated and non-accountable, and on the outcomes as ineffective in improving quality but designed to secure a more compliant research base. The panel (1997) has reported on how it carried out its task, and on the difficulties it encountered in doing so.

In what follows, I look forward rather than back and make no claim to be expressing other views than my own. In so far as you take it into account in shaping a strategy for the next research review, you should keep firmly in mind that the panel membership and its criteria will be different. More ambitiously, I hope that some of the problems encountered in 1996 will have been resolved or at least diminished. Elisabeth Gerver has identified those problems as they related to research in adult and continuing education, and it is not too early to bring your own collective strength to bear on solving them.

I begin with some comments on the 1996 outcomes. All panels received substantial and frequent advice on how to apply the funding councils' criteria in the same or compatible ways. Yet there were large differences in the distribution of grades. These might be taken as reflecting real differences in the quality of research between different academic areas, but my belief in the objectivity of assessment is insufficient to support that conclusion. It may have been predictable, for various reasons, that nursing and professions allied to medicine would be far below the 'parent' disciplines. But is psychology so evidently more excellent than sociology in the quality of its research as would appear from comparing their relative grades? Or is history so much better than English? It is possible to see the effects of competing pressures in subject areas containing large components of professional practice, supervision, and development.

In that context, education had a more even distribution of grades than (for example) law and social policy/social work. It was, of course, considerably larger than both. Indeed, it was the largest unit of all in relation both to the number of submissions *and* the numbers of research-active staff whose work they reported. Overall, the grades in education were higher than in 1992 (with 80% in grades 3-5 compared to 66% in that earlier exercise) and markedly higher than in 1989. More significantly, 19 education departments were among the highest rated in their institutions and over two-thirds were in the upper half of the overall performance.

Reviewing the likely effects of assessment, the publication *Research Fortnight* (29 January 1997) refers to universities 're-engineering their production lines'. As departments shape their strategies for next time, they will be aware of the pressures to 'research to the test' and 'publish to the test'. They may try to identify what they believe to be favoured research areas or styles, or the 'right' balance between the 'pure' and the 'applied' or between the immediately 'useful' and the longer-term and risky. They may be inclined to rank types of publications or the 'best' journals, and seek to point or even direct staff in those directions. I have certainly been asked repeatedly since the 1996 exercise was finished for reassurance that credit was given for publishing research findings in professional journals, and sometimes reminded that the funding councils explicitly included research intended to 'shape policy or improve practice'. On that particular question, the answer is yes - provided that the research base of the professional publication was also evident and had been made available to fellow researchers as well as to the professionals whose practice it is hoped to influence.

On the larger question of departmental research profiles, I hope that the 1996 panel did not embody an establishment view of the 'best' kinds of research even though (like other panels) its membership was certainly drawn from successful departments and 'new' universities were very under-represented. Our published criteria urged departments to make clear what their research priorities had been and why, and to identify clearly the evidence of those priorities in their activities and their output. Despite my earlier warning about not anticipating what another panel might do, I am sure that the best departmental strategy is to have a clear view of the research to which it is committed and which it believes it does well, and then to co-ordinate its efforts accordingly. As argued later, this should be done without coercing those individuals whose research interests may not fit. And the co-ordination is more effective when it comes from a lively and collegial research culture rather than from directives. My impression from 1996 is of rather low correlation between research quality and tightly-managed research environments.

The preceding paragraph raises a difficult question about the focus of assessment. I understand that some panels graded individual researchers, even each individual publication. That seems to me to represent an inappropriately over-individualised view of how most research is done. Within departments, there will be those whose research is very much an individual interest and who may not need research grants to undertake it. There are also those whose research partners are located in other universities, often in other countries. I doubt if past research assessment exercises have given due weight to collaborative research, or to inter-disciplinary research.

But one of the biggest problems the Education panel faced in 1996, as indicated in its published report, was the treatment of sub-areas. The funding councils' grades criteria were framed in relation to the quality of sub-areas. Some departments failed to identify any, forcing by default an assessment of individuals. Some claimed coherent groupings of research which were barely evident in their

published output. Forty departments, of very different sizes, presented four or fewer sub-areas while another 17 had more than seven and some ran into double figures. A small number may indicate a highly purposeful concentration of research effort, or a drawing of a vague boundary around some disparate activities so as (perhaps) to hide the more mediocre. A large number might indicate highly specialised forms of investigation, but make it difficult to meet the 'all or most excellent' criterion required for a high overall grade. The real, rather than merely presentational, benefits of grouping research in vigorous and visible 'areas', and of doing so without inhibiting those whose research lies outside them or depends on more cosmopolitan research links, are matters worth very careful discussion within departments. As identified by the departments themselves, sub-areas were defined in such different ways that the only generalisations it is easy to make (and a mapping exercise is planned by Michael Bassey on behalf of BERA) are that 'applied' labels were overwhelmingly predominant and that such disciplinary labels as sociology were almost entirely avoided.

The creation of a sub-panel for Continuing Education recognised the amount and the diversity of the research involved. The diversity highlighted general problems of drawing boundaries around what was research, and what was research of a particular kind. Elisabeth Gerver has described those problems from the inside. From my outside perspective, it seemed as though some departments were still concentrating on research within a fairly traditional definition of 'adult and continuing education', thereby giving their output a distinctive and coherent shape. Most were not. That the division of labour between panel and sub-panel was complex and contested reflects how much higher and further education have expanded and how much 'educational' research has become less dominated by 'schooling'. Uncertainty in deciding where some research should go, and the fact that some was reviewed both by the sub-panel and the main panel, may have caused some procedural difficulties, but they also reflect a substantial broadening of the activity relevant to each. It seemed to me that the research categorised for assessment as 'adult and continuing' was much larger and more varied than in 1992. How it is to be assessed next time should be a matter for very careful consultation.

Suggestions were made in the de-briefing meetings for those who had chaired panels that the frequency of assessment creates too much short-term planning and too much temptation to engage in quickly-productive research. I share that view, although the demands of accountability make it unlikely to prevail. What does need serious reconsideration before another exercise is implemented is the meanings to be given to national and international excellence. The question 'What is my nation?' could not be avoided by a panel receiving submissions from all four 'nations' in the United Kingdom, even if it had not had Scottish and Welsh members. It could not be avoided either because much of the research submitted - most obviously in policy, curriculum and assessment - had a strongly national focus and relevance which made international excellence very hard to assess and international impact unlikely. Clearly, international recognition is easier in less culture-bound sub-areas. The panel was

careful not to treat international networking or participation in international conferences as sufficient evidence of excellence, and tried not to detach international 'stars' (especially when recently recruited) from the wider research environment to which they might (or might not) be contributing. In 1996, panels were not given any workable definition of 'international excellence' and were advised against publishing their own. I hope that a measure so crucial to grading is less post-modernist in nature next time. Even in principle, it raises an interesting issue about research priorities. Taken 'straight', it would seem to indicate a further concentration of research in 'centres of excellence' because more dispersed activity might be judged less likely to produce work of a quality to demand international attention. But current pressures to produce work relevant to making teaching a more 'research-based profession', and a more general emphasis on involving potential users in the doing as well as the disseminating of research such as is illustrated by the ESRC, seem to point more to dispersal. This is another matter which goes far beyond pragmatic and tactical considerations to fundamental questions about what research is most worth doing, and why.

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From uneasy bedfellows to willing partners: continuing education in the research assessment exercises 1992-96

Elisabeth Gerver

Not being indigenously British, I believe in transparency of decision making as far as possible. But there are important constraints governing what one can say about the research assessment exercises. Firstly, the research assessment exercise data on recommended continuing education grades are not available in any form, not even for overall quantitative analysis. Secondly, the funding councils' confidential feedback to institutions, which sometimes refers to the continuing education parts of their submissions, is not public.

The title of my paper refers back to the title of my talk at the Universities Association for Continuing Education seminar on the 1992 research assessment exercise, 'Uneasy bedfellows in unquiet times', the term 'uneasy bedfellows' referring to the relationship between continuing education and education (Gerver 1994). The times are even more unquiet these days, but the change to 'willing partners' is intended to imply that education and continuing education have grown closer and more compatible in the four years between the exercises, because that seems to me one of the major lessons to be learned from the 1996 research assessment exercise. In this context, I shall touch briefly on my perceptions of what we did in assessing continuing education research, sketch what I believe to be changes in the handling of continuing education between the 1992 and the 1996 exercises, and rashly offer a few pieces of unsolicited advice for the next round.

Approaches to assessing continuing education research

The sub panel's remit was to advise the main panel on recommended grades and comments on them for the 64 submissions which contained continuing education citations. We adopted a definition of continuing education which was basically post compulsory education and training, but with certain restrictions. Using this definition (outlined in Gerver 1997), the chairman of the Education panel and I agreed which individual publications would be considered as continuing education.

As far as possible, the sub panel used the same methods as the main panel. We considered only those parts of the submissions which covered the lists of publications and the outlines of the research cultures and achievements. We carried out a limited amount of selective reading, where we lacked sufficient knowledge of work which institutions noted as important strengths and where institutional grades were borderline or otherwise uncertain. What problems resulted?

Our first challenge was to negotiate a working definition of continuing education research. Because the boundaries of research in education, continuing education and post compulsory education and training are blurred, there were intrinsic difficulties in disaggregating continuing education research in submissions. This problem was exacerbated by three factors. Firstly, institutions varied enormously in how they presented their continuing education research: some grouped it together as a coherent sub area, but most did not. Titles were sometimes ambiguous - 'continuing professional development', for example, often referred solely to professional school teachers (an area excluded from the continuing education remit). Secondly, despite the fact that the grading criteria for the research assessment exercise were framed in terms of sub areas, most institutions did not identify any sub areas. Thirdly, where institutions did identify sub areas, they mentioned post compulsory education and training (22 times) far more than adult or continuing education (9 times). Our very pragmatic definition of continuing education was based on that emphasis on post compulsory education and training, taking account of the spread of expertise on the sub panel, the reference to post compulsory research in the Education panel's published criteria and the blurred boundaries already mentioned.

As a result, our definition was probably wider than some institutions might have anticipated, institutional submissions were fragmented, and the time we had to assess submissions was considerably reduced. The alternative, however, would probably have been to abandon any attempt to assess continuing education separately at all.

The Education Panel's (1997) careful formulation of our second problem is that 'The Sub Panel discussed at length with the RAE team the problem of the handling of non-education research submitted to the Education Panel', in the light of the explicit published guidelines against submitting such research to Education. In fact, the number of institutions submitting substantial amounts of non-educational research was relatively small, but the resultant problems loomed large. One could argue that institutions submitting non-education research may have gained an advantage in terms of staff numbers over those who did not. One could also note that non-education research received more intensive scrutiny than did education research, because of the need to consult specialist advisers. Beyond this point, 'I couldn't possibly comment', as a well known fictional politician has phrased it.

The tedious, time consuming details of our third problem of locating and reading publications are described elsewhere in these papers. The fourth problem of the effects of census date was less than we had originally feared - aside from the problem created when more than one institution claimed to be employing the same researcher full time on the census date!

Continuing education research since 1992

Against this background, what seem to be the changing characteristics of continuing education research between 1992 and 1996? To begin with, as I have already mentioned, the definition of what constitutes continuing education research has widened to include most of post compulsory education and training, in response to the predominance of such an emphasis in the research submitted. Secondly, in 1992, the Education panel had decided not to use explicit criteria in assessing submissions. Reassuringly, the 1996 Education panel was explicit about almost all of its criteria. Because of guidance from the funding councils, however, we did not define national and international excellence.

Thirdly, in 1996, the Education panel placed even greater emphasis on research cultures than in 1992, and institutions reported in more detail on this facet of their research. Fourthly, the balance between quantity and quality has shifted. At the UACE seminar on the 1992 research assessment exercise, members of the adjunct panel on Continuing Education discerned, as Chris Duke (1994) put it, 'a significant slip from the qualitative emphasis towards more tangible quantification'. In 1996, the Education panel had access to statistical indicators derived from information supplied by the funding councils, but we used these indicators only as context and focused instead on the perceived quality of submitted work and research cultures.

Fifthly, what are known as 'tails' have become more dangerous. In 1992, Chris Duke (1994) believed, large departments 'got away with carrying sometimes significant numbers of low-performing education researchers'. By contrast, in 1996, it appeared to me as if departments with long 'tails' tended to be awarded lower grades than might have been achieved with more selective submissions.

In the light of these differences between 1992 and 1996, I should now like to glance at what seem to me to be the substantial differences in the kind of continuing education research cultures between then and now. Since 1992, continuing education researchers appear to have become much more conscious of the cultures within which they operate. The continuing education components of submissions showed more explicitly managed research environments: the strategic direction of research promotion, support and monitoring is now far more prominent and explicit than in 1992. Because of this emphasis on the coherence of research, few submissions included the kind of individual discipline-based research characteristic of adult education departments in the pre 1992 universities, although there is a continuing growth in interdisciplinary work.

Compared with 1992, there now appear to be far more 'active researchers' in the UK engaged in continuing education research. In the pre 1992 universities, such activity has increased at least partly because of the Universities Funding Councils' continuing education research grants. In the post 1992

universities, Dev R funding appears to have helped in the substantial growth of numbers of researchers returned for the exercise. Both types of funding are, of course, politically inconvenient examples of the beneficial uses of public resources.

My general impression is that institutions in 1996 reported far more substantial external funding for continuing education research than had been the case in 1992, including funding from charities and, occasionally, the ESRC. Central government has been a very substantial funder of continuing education research. But such funding tends not to be subject to peer review; it is therefore rated as less important than grants from charities and, especially, the ESRC. As well as the very impressive growth in external funding for continuing education research, there also seems to have been a growth in the numbers of continuing education research students.

Education submissions in 1996 tended to be much more explicitly organised in terms of clusters of expertise, and certain major players in continuing education research are now emerging. Although there has not been time to conduct detailed comparisons between pre and post 1992 universities, I have calculated that the post 1992 universities were over-represented amongst the 47 institutions having more than 10% of their research in the field of continuing education: they formed 62% of such submissions, although overall they represented only 55% of submissions to the Education panel. However, the pre 1992 universities had, on average, a larger number of continuing education publications per submission than did the post 1992 institutions: the former averaged 34 continuing education publications each, as compared to 20 in the latter.

1996 submissions containing continuing education also showed more pronounced evidence of the effects of research - such as widespread dissemination of the findings, requests for consultancies based on research, connections with government policy, and enhancement of student learning. Overall, there also seems now to be more collaboration within and among universities in submissions classified as continuing education. Collaboration is particularly noticeable at European level. The amount of European Commission funding for continuing education multi-country research is growing and interest in comparative studies with other European countries is becoming more widespread.

Unsolicited advice for future planning

Do the characteristics of continuing education research submitted to the 1996 research assessment exercise have any implications for our preparation for 2000 - if such an exercise is undertaken again? There are several possibilities. My first piece of advice is to *manage and nurture a research culture*. My general impression is that departments with explicit, well developed, supportive research cultures tended to produce more substantial research publications. Secondly, I believe that it may be in institutions' best interests to *focus on clusters of research expertise*. The days of departments full of

brilliant scholars pursuing their unique, serendipitous research are nearly over as far as research assessment exercises are concerned. The rules of assessment through sub areas and the emphasis on coherence of research profiles in the exercises tend to militate against isolated scholarship, as does the increasing tendency for money to flow towards centres of recognised, collaborative expertise.

Thirdly, continuing education researchers could fruitfully *strengthen their alliances with education*. After 1992 I tried to persuade UACE colleagues about the value of conceptual and practical links between all forms of educational research. My reasons were the enormous amount of common ground shared by both education and continuing education researchers and the fact that the field of education appears to be moving towards a broader concept of education as its paradigm for the future, in the wider concept of lifelong learning. This case has, if anything, gained urgency as a result of the increasing use of the concept of lifelong learning in the interim.

Fourthly, we now need to work more methodically to *build post compulsory education and training theory*. There is growing momentum behind moves to embed continuing education within post compulsory education and training. I have the impression, however, that theory building lags far behind the development of new methodologies and the staking out of new territory in this area.

Another major challenge for the future is to *establish evidence of impact*. The government's emphasis on the end users of research, together with the funding bodies' interest in the impact of their funding, will probably heighten the role of impact in any future exercise. However, the difficulties of providing evidence for impact remain formidable. The UACE research sub committee hopes to address this issue in another seminar in 1997-98.

Next, we need to *find another home for non-education research*. I suspect that the strictures against submitting non education research to the Education panel will be even more explicit in 2000. In the future we should also simply *forget non-peer-reviewed publications* as far as research assessment is concerned. Those institutions which submitted large numbers of apparently non-peer reviewed publications did not advance their research reputations in 1996. Finally, I hope that the next exercise will insist that we should *submit only complete data* rather than being as tolerant of incomplete data on publications as this exercise tended to be.

Conclusion

Research assessment exercises are, by their very nature, an invitation to cynicism. I nevertheless believe that, given the framework within which the sub panel had to work, we assessed continuing education research in UK universities as fairly as we could, and we found much of it in a very healthy state.

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Research output and research cultures: issues of assessment and value

John Field

Like the main Education panel, the sub-panel of Continuing Education had to make judgements about two features of each department that it considered. These were the vitality of its research culture and the quality of its published output. These are different phenomena, and they had to be judged in rather different ways. This paper focuses upon *qualitative aspects* of the sub-panel's use of evidence supplied by each department about its research output and culture, and tries to identify lessons which can be learned in better managing our research activities in the future.

Judging research cultures

In their guidance to the Education panel, the funding councils emphasised that the ratings should be 'based primarily' on the evidence relating to public output and research culture. However, the term 'research culture' was not defined precisely. In the published statement on research in Education, the funding councils referred to 'the vitality of the department's research culture, and how its research is promoted, organised and monitored' (HEFCE 1996, 157). This was ambiguous: did the funding councils mean that the way in which departments promoted, organised and monitored their research *was* the research culture; or did they mean that these were additional criteria, to be considered *as well as* the research culture? In practice, the sub-panel largely treated these questions of management and resourcing as aspects of a departmental research culture.

Operationally, this therefore constituted a broad and inclusive definition of what we understood by the term 'research culture'. A more narrow, focused definition might have made the task easier, but it would also inevitably have been conservative (relying largely on the established view) and exclusive (attending only to that evidence which related specifically to our prior definition). Moreover, the funding councils had indicated broadly what types of evidence would be relevant to a judgement (HEFCE 1996). These included departments' own accounts of their research structures, priorities and strategies (as described in forms RA5 and RA6); evidence of public esteem, such as journal editorships (described in the RA6); and such quantitative material as levels of research funding, numbers of research students, higher degree completion rates, and the proportion of research-active staff (though all of this information was to be used in such a way as not to penalise small departments).

In comparison with the quality of public output, the difficulties of assessing anything as nebulous as a research culture were challenging. Evidence of public output was brief (up to four items per academic) and by definition the output itself was in the public domain, and its quality could easily be

verified. By contrast, the evidence relating to research culture varied wildly in its nature, and much of it was based on statements from institutions that could be verified only with extreme difficulty, if at all. All of these difficulties were faced by all panels; in addition, the sub-panel faced the further hurdle of trying to use evidence which related to a whole department in reaching judgements about the research culture in continuing education. In many cases, this proved impossible; in others, where continuing education was a clearly defined sub-area, it was relatively straightforward. In comparison with data on publications, the sub-panel made relatively little use of information on the research culture. As well as the difficulties alluded to above, this was also in part because the main panel was already looking at the same material, usually on an integrated basis. In any future exercise, researchers in continuing education will need to be sure that their institution's submission allows for their work to be accurately identified and assessed.

Judging public output

By comparison with research culture, the sub-panel found the evaluation of published output a relatively easy task. Individual sub-panel members read small samples for all institutions, and submitted reports on their selected reading. Expanded samples were scrutinised where the sub-panel decided that further reading was necessary to reach a clear judgement, and where the material was readily available. Members also relied on their prior knowledge of individual pieces of research in making their recommendations.

In recommending a particular judgement on a department's output, the sub-panel had to tackle the thorny issue of how it defined excellence. Like the main Education panel, it tried to be inclusive, recognising the diversity of methods, approaches and purposes which have flourished in a trans- and multi-disciplinary field with blurred and permeable boundaries and which encompass a disparate range of institutions and practices. Nevertheless, the funding councils required all panels and sub-panels to decide what proportion of a department's work should be regarded as of a national or an international standard. In the natural sciences, a number of panels decided to use quantitative impact indicators to make this judgement, based on the number of citations earned by each researcher in each department over the assessment period. In the social sciences, including Education, no one has yet managed to provide an acceptable and defensible method of assessing whether an individual's work reaches a national or international standard.

The problems are more easily stated than resolved. Pragmatically, the sub-panel's task was to make recommendations on the basis of the selected publications submitted by the departments. One way of approaching this might have been to pose some harsh but realistic questions. How much does this piece of work actually matter? How much does it add to our knowledge of post-compulsory education and training? How does it compare with the best of continuing education research in other countries?

Looking ahead

Looking ahead, this means that many continuing education researchers will work towards a coherent and clear relationship with the rest of the Education unit of assessment. There are also other issues concerning research culture that departments might need to consider.

- *Research management*: the sub-panel did consider the ways in which RA5 and RA6 outlined the department's structures, strategies and priorities, as these could provide evidence of the way in which research into continuing education was regarded internally. This could include information about the targeted use of RAE income over the previous funding period and about the creation of senior research positions in the sub-area or evidence of encouragement and training for newly-appointed staff to undertake research.

- *Research funding*: while the sub-panel could not use the quantitative data on external income (because no separate data were available for continuing education), it did consider information in RA5 and RA6, which often listed the outstanding research contracts in continuing education.

- *Research students*: once more, separate data for continuing education were not available, so it was not possible to use this information unless specific detail was given in RA5 and RA6 (for example, on the use of RAE income to create student bursaries, or on the numbers of overseas research students attracted to study continuing education in a particular institution).

- *Other indicators of esteem*: while some departments said very little in the RA6, others provided evidence of leadership in continuing education research (such as journal editorships; hosting of, or participation in, refereed conferences; keynote speeches; important partnerships; international visitors; or other evidence that research was prized by practitioners and professionals in the field).

In respect of publications, there were some obvious pitfalls and problems. These included:

- *Missing information:* I was surprised at how many submissions left out details, despite clear guidance from the funding councils. While nobody wants to penalise a department on a technicality, it is difficult to claim that research excellence is a key institutional priority when you cannot provide accurate details about four publications, or if a panel member cannot trace a particular publication.

- *Doubts about the public status of some item:* the funding councils informed all institutions that they should only list publications that were in the public domain. This instruction can create difficulties in an applied field of study such as post-compulsory education and training, where high

quality research may lead to a consultancy report which is distributed regionally or within an organisation but is not widely available elsewhere.

- *Lack of a clear research basis:* the funding councils emphasised in their guidance that all curriculum materials or professional publications would be judged, not as professional contributions, but *in terms of the quality of the underlying research.* In principle, this advice potentially favoured an applied and engaged field such as continuing education, where research often leads directly to a practical outcome, so long as the institution provides evidence that allows the sub-panel to judge the quality of the underlying research. In reality, things are not as clear cut as that: materials such as a television programme, a language pack, or an interactive CD are made to stand alone, without even the benefit of a methodological appendix to help in the RAE! Similar problems apply to reflection, whether on policy or practice: where do we draw the line between personal opinion or sectional lobbying on the one hand and serious investigations of experience and policy on the other?

Conclusions

All of this, though, is to grant too much to the RAE as it currently exists. Of course we have to live with it and therefore make the best of it, but we also need to challenge some of its assumptions. In particular, we need to state plainly that in some respects, the RAE may be damaging the cause of continuing education research. It represents a paradigm of knowledge which is derived largely from the natural sciences, but its procedures allow for tacit values and norms to inform the final judgements. In these circumstances, those departments which want to avoid risks will opt for the line of least resistance. In practice, that will often mean discouraging types of research which seem to be innovative, challenging or multi-disciplinary in approach. This would take much of the sting out of continuing education research, which has often been irreverent and provocative, working to undermine, rather than to reinforce, the established hierarchies of knowledge. It would be ironic if this were to happen just as the dominant definitions of knowledge and research have started to be replaced by more open, fluid and provisional conceptions (Scott 1995).

Does RAE 1996 provide any lessons for the ways in which we might defend and advance continuing education research? I think so. Three developments in particular strike me as urgent. The first is to review the theory and practice relationship in continuing education research. In a recent paper, Tom Schuller (1997) suggested that the integration of theory and practice in continuing education does no favours to the quality of our research. By contrast, I think that we should force the pace on the distinctive nature of research in the field of continuing education. This implies a clearer definition of its distinguishing features, and a robust defence of its legitimacy; it also implies that it should lead to firmly grounded studies of lifelong learning, which can be submitted to any external authority with

confidence. I do not believe that all of the work which is currently defended as innovative, learner-centred or practitioner-driven is of that quality; much of what has gone under the banner of participatory research, for example, has been of ephemeral or local interest at best. So my first aim would be to pursue vigorously the cause of challenging, transdisciplinary, accessible and meaningful studies of lifelong learning in its many changing settings.

Secondly, I think that we need to look again at our relationship with the rest of educational studies. What Paul Belanger has called the 'silent explosion' in adult learning - that is, the rapid growth of learning *outside* the walls of colleges and training centres - has its parallel in schools and initial training, as governments and employers come to recognise the desirability of lifelong learning, even of something called a 'learning society'. In these circumstances, there is a growing convergence between the interests of researchers who in the past might have focused only on one age group, one subject and one type of institution (Ranson 1996). One possible outcome is a ferocious competition between those who come from a background in post-compulsory education and training on the one hand, and 'trespassers' from mainstream educational research on the other. I have no idea who would win and who would lose, because my own preference would be to seek new alliances and partnerships, placing, as Ranson has argued, learning at the centre of our investigations.

The third set of lessons concerns the need for rejuvenation of the research community itself. If you have any sense of mischief, one of the minor delights of involvement in the RAE is that you get to find out your colleagues' birthdays. I couldn't help noticing that we are an ageing community; of anything, we seem slightly older than the sectoral average. This is not simply a matter of stagnation in the academic pool of labour. One recent study noted that, although there is no great difficulty in recruiting replacements for staff who retire, the incomers tend to be of a similar age - though not gender - to the existing academic workforce (Keep *et al* 1996). Nor am I suggesting that over-45s make bad researchers; it is partly that we cannot fully respond to those important but neglected research agendas which are emerging among younger adults and partly that we have a limited shelf-life. With shrinking resources, and while maintaining and improving the gender balance, how can we best renew an ageing continuing education research community?

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Is research quality measurable? Reflections on the implications of the research assessment for continuing education

Maria Slowey

Not another RAE post-mortem!

Writing about the research assessment exercise (RAE) some time after the outcomes have been thoroughly analysed poses something of a dilemma. The bones have been well picked over not only in the higher education 'trade' journal *The Higher*, but also at many conferences and seminars and, of course, within institutions up and down the country. The methods of operation of the Education panel and the Continuing Education sub panel have already been well described (see for example, *Research Intelligence*, 59 and 60, 1997). Field (1997) has covered the work of the Continuing Education sub-panel in some detail, highlighting, amongst other things, the fact that the title of the sub-panel was something of a misnomer as its remit extended beyond continuing education to include research on further and higher education, professional development, post-nineteen vocational education and training.

Many of us may therefore be suffering from a certain sense of 'post-RAE fatigue syndrome'. However, in terms of the impact of this initiative organisationally within higher education institutions and academically within the different research areas, the RAE is certainly not yesterday's news.

After all the debates have died down, the outcome of the 1996 RAE continues to shape institutional decisions in very significant ways. These decisions have an impact across the system as a whole, reaching through faculties, schools and departments to the level of the individual researcher. The most obvious way in which the outcome of the RAE is affecting the system relates to funding. There are variations in the degree of transparency of the financial models used by different institutions. However, in general, moves towards greater devolution in budgets coupled with expectations of the funding councils that resources are to be channelled to those areas where they have been generated, mean that the viability of whole subject areas or departments may be threatened if a target grade has not been achieved.

The other way in which the RAE outcome has a direct and profound impact on the work of academics relates to questions of prestige and recognition of quality. This reinforces the trend set in motion by the 1992 exercise. It is not surprising that of all the assessment and audit practices introduced by the funding councils and the Higher Education Quality Council, the RAE has proved the most influential (Kogan and Henkel 1996). Their study of academics at 11 universities in England indicates that pressure to maintain or enhance research ratings has meant that those staff who bring research funding into departments and who are actively engaged in publication tend to be in a position to seek

to negotiate a reduction in teaching and administrative loads. The growth in the 'transfer market' is another phenomenon which has been attributed significantly to the RAE.

So what about the impact of the RAE on research in education and training? What can we say more specifically about the impact on research in the field of post-compulsory and continuing education and training? Other contributors to this volume explore issues relating to the criteria adopted and the procedures used by those of us who were members of the Continuing Education sub-panel in reaching recommended grades. My focus is on the outcomes of this process, commencing with an analysis of the patterns revealed by the distribution of grades (1) I shall then proceed to make a number of observations on what appear to me to be some of the main consequences, whether intended or unintended, of these outcomes for research in the field of continuing education.

The assessment results

The first point of note about the Education unit of assessment (UoA) is the sheer volume - 104 separate institutions made returns under this category. This was the largest number for any of the 69 different subject areas and, as Table 1 indicates, only in the case of three other subject areas did 90 or more universities make submissions. In terms of the other principal volume indicator, the total number of staff returned as research active per UoA, Education was just beaten to first place by hospital based clinical medicine (the numbers being 2,801.9 and 2,814.2 respectively).

Table 1 also shows a weighted average grade derived on a scale of 1 to 7 to allow for the categories of 3a/3b and 5/5* to be distinguished. It is important to bear in mind that this is just one ranking method amongst many which could be employed, however; while the subject of debate, it has gained some currency because of its use by *The Higher*. There are, of course, enormous difficulties in making comparisons between different disciplines and, in particular, between the science based subjects and the social sciences and the arts.

With these strong words of caution in mind, we can note that the average for the Education grade does lie at the lower end of the spectrum, 58th out of a total of 68 units of assessment. There are many possible interpretations. Panels can be internally consistent while tending to score 'high' or 'low' overall. The criteria might have been interpreted particularly rigorously by the Education panel. It is nonetheless interesting to note that those UoAs which have the highest average weighted grades involve relatively small numbers of submissions. In rank order the first five were Biochemistry (17 submissions); Mineral and Mining Engineering (20 submissions); Classics, Ancient History,

[1] This analysis is based on data which is available from published sources. The recommended grades from the Continuing Education Sub-Panel to the main Education Panel are not in the public domain and therefore, regrettably, cannot form part of this discussion.

Byzantine and Modern Greek (27 submissions); Anatomy (11 submissions), Archaeology (26 submissions).

Table 1
UoAs ranked in order of numbers of institutions making submissions (Top 5)

UoA	number of institutions[1]	rank order of size of UoA	total number of staff assessed (full-time equivalent)[1]	rank order of size of cohort of staff	weighted average grade	rank order of weighted grade[2]
Education	104	1	2,801.9	2	4.026	58
History	98	2	1,629.0	5	5.122	16
Business and Management	96	3	2,322.0	3	4.234	56
English Language and Literature	90	4	1,418.5	9	4.426	50
Art and Design	82	5	1,578.0	6	3.930	59

[1] Derived from HEFCE 1996
[2] Outcomes weighted on a 1 to 7 scale per submitted active Category A staff as follows: Grade "1", 1; Grade "2", 2; Grade "3b", 3; Grade "3a", 4; Grade "4", 5; Grade "5", 6; Grade "5*", 7. Source: *the Times Higher*, 20 December 1996

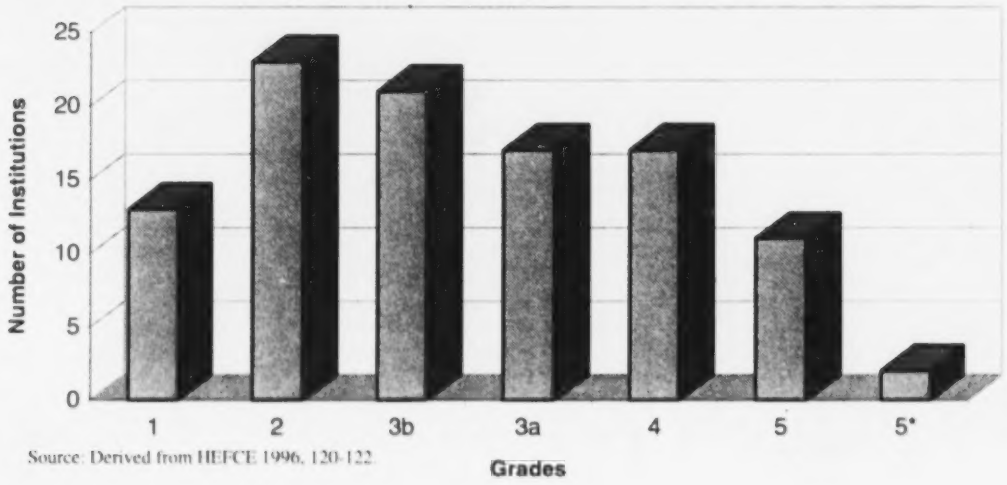
While not dismissing the potential significance of these factors, a number of others must be brought into the equation when considering the Education results. Firstly, the impact of much excellent research in education was somewhat diluted by a difficulty of drawing boundaries around the field. At times it was difficult not to think, as Professor Edwards, chair of the Education panel put it, that 'all human life' was within the remit of the Education panel. It also appeared as if some institutions may have used the Education UoA as a catchall for work which did not have an obvious home. Secondly, because of the very strong links to practice, many of the publications cited were not conventional research publications but took the form of project reports, internal publications, reflections on practice, innovative teaching materials - both a strength and weakness of this field and a point to which I shall return later.

Thirdly, the fact that this UoA comprises more universities than any other also means that it involves a wider spread of different types of institution. It incorporates teacher training and the delivery of adult continuing education programmes where the primary focus may not traditionally have been on research. As a consequence there are likely to be a disproportionate number of new researchers in this UoA and a relatively low overall proportion of staff submitted as research active. Only about one

third of the institutional Education submissions involved 80% or more of staff employed on academic contracts, while over half returned less than 60% of academic staff as research active.

Illustrating the outcome of the exercise, Figure 1 summarises the overall distribution of grades for the Education UoA. This shows that the panel made full use of the distinction between 3b and 3a. Overall, around 40% of the submissions were rated at a 1 or 2 while just under a third achieved a 4 or above. Two institutions (the Institute of Education and King's College, London) were rated at 5*.

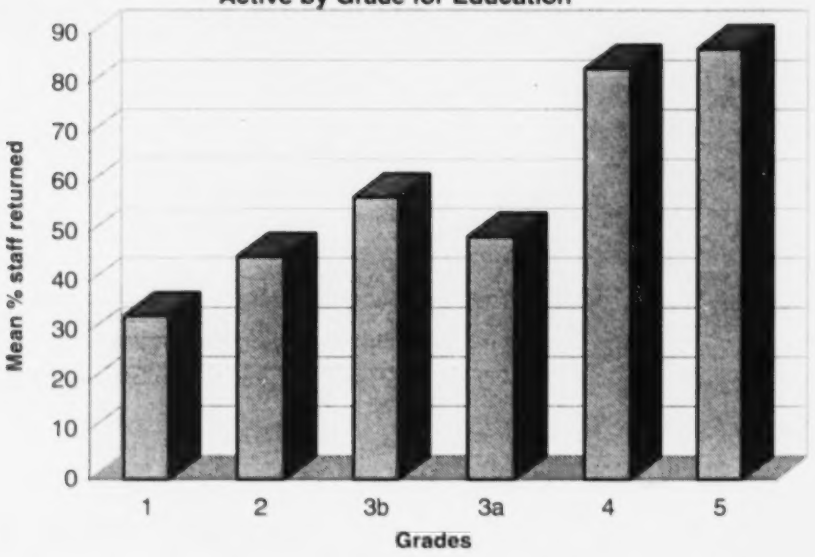
Figure 1
RAE 1996 - Distribution of Grades for Education



Source: Derived from HEFCE 1996, 120-122.

The combination of these two elements - the grade achieved and number of staff defined as research active - is extremely significant as they combine to determine the resource allocated to the institution. The work of the sub-panel focused exclusively on questions of quality of research in terms of published output and vitality of research culture. The proportion of active staff was not something which was given any particular weight except possibly in a small number of cases in relation to questions of viability. Given this fact it is interesting that, as Figure 2 demonstrates, there is an almost linear relationship between the mean percentage of staff returned and the grade achieved: those institutions which achieved the highest grades also returned the highest percentage of their staff as research active. This correlation does not, of course, demonstrate causality - both variables are the consequence of other factors - but it is a graph which carries particular resonance.

Figure 2
RAE1996: Mean Percentage of Staff Returned as Research Active by Grade for Education*



* The mean percentage is based on the mid-point of the bands A to F. For simplification the two institutions which achieved a 5* rating have been subsumed into the 5 category.

Source: Derived from HEFCE 1996, 120-122.

Some reflections on the outcomes

In reflecting on the implications of the above analysis, there are three dimensions which I find of particular interest. The first of these is simply a question of 'follow the money'. The resourcing implications of the RAE results cannot be over-emphasised both across the system as a whole and within individual institutions. The formulae used by the different funding councils vary somewhat, but essentially they involve a significant multiplier, channelling resources to those areas achieving high grades. To take the example of Scotland, the allocation for the Education UoA per submitted active Category A staff ranges from zero (for a 1 or 2 grade) through £7,293 for 3b and up to £27,160 for 5 or 5*. The implications of the distribution of this scale of funding across the higher education sector between different types of institutions are obvious.

Secondly, the distribution of research activity and associated resources across the system as a whole reflects, amongst other things, the diversity of the higher education system and the multiple goals and varying priorities of different universities. It is worth noting, however, in spite of this diversity, the high degree of consensus in the self-perception of academic staff. Reporting on the large scale

Carnegie survey carried out in 1992 of around 9,000 academics in England, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany, Fulton (1996, 164) comments that in this survey, as in many others 'the clearest result is simply this, that the over-riding norm for academic staff across disciplines (and taking academic rank, sector and country into consideration) is that both teaching and research are of subjective importance.'

For many of those involved in university continuing education, however, the question of multiple goals goes beyond that of combining research and teaching to a much broader area of activity which might loosely be encompassed under the heading of 'service to the community'. This significant commitment to practice places considerable work burdens for those who seek to undertake research, teach in adult education or related areas and engage in significant academic development work in terms of seeking to widen access and forging external partnerships. This pursuit of multiple goals by definition therefore involves the management of tensions and conflicts. However, it also stimulates considerable intellectual excitement and can release great creativity.

This leads on to my third point concerning the nature of scholarship within contemporary higher education. The issue of the nature of excellence in research in applied areas such as education and continuing education reflects a broader discussion about higher education's responsibility for the application and utilisation of knowledge. In discussing the obstacles to universities playing a fuller role in transferring knowledge to the wider community, Schuetze (1996) points to the dominance of a linear model whereby knowledge is viewed as a commodity which is developed within universities and 'handed over' to the outside world for application. The approach to which many researchers in continuing education aspire offers an alternative to this view. Not only is research multi-disciplinary, but it builds upon a view of the development of knowledge as something dynamic, requiring interaction and constant feedback. At its (admittedly rare) best, work emanating from this perspective can provide an antidote to the overspecialisation of much of today's academic output. This search for a broader view of research is not something new but still seems to have difficulty in establishing itself despite the growing demands of a knowledge-based society.

Conclusion

To return to the question asked in the title of this contribution 'Is research quality measurable?' I would say that, in terms of the criteria identified, the RAE was rigorously conducted, delivering 'measures' of quality that were as fair as possible. But this is a little like saying that IQ results are very good measures of an individual's ability to undertake IQ tests.

The challenge now lies in developing appropriate ways of assessing quality in innovative areas of research with close relationships to practice. We must surely be able to find more creative ways of

demonstrating the excellence of such work than, for example, relying on whether it has been written up for publication in an academic journal - individual copies of which are likely to be read by fewer and fewer people as the number of titles proliferate and library budgets are cut.

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Lessons to be learned and implications for future strategies

Report from the group led by Pat Davies

Paul Armstrong

The report of the discussion is organised around the issues that emerged from the group, looking ahead to the RAE for the year 2000, whilst reflecting on the experience of 1996. There were five broad issues: responding to speakers, drawing boundaries, identification of panel, specifying criteria of excellence, and impact and influence.

1. Responding to speakers

This area of discussion focused on the shortcomings of the submissions to the 1996 RAE, particularly as identified by the speakers in the morning session, based on their experience in looking at the research output of the range of continuing education departments and institutions. Essentially, the message was to follow instructions, and provide the kind of information requested, as fully as required; to pay heed to the nature of the research work submitted and the nature of the publication; to provide full reference information; to be aware of the need for coherence in the institutional response; to avoid the submission of research more than once; and to attempt to maximise the number of research active staff. Institutions need to identify the potential issues and pitfalls early on in the process, and to attempt to address these prior to submission (that is, good planning procedures). In other words, the responsibilities of departments and institutions are threefold:

- to critically review their experience of RAE in 1996
- to get as much feedback as possible about their performance
- to implement a strategy for avoiding pitfalls, for identifying any revised criteria, and to ensure that new procedures for 2000 are followed correctly.

2. Drawing boundaries

There was some concern expressed at the fact that neither the Education panel, nor even the Continuing Education sub-panel, had offered advice on what actually counted as continuing education. Whilst there was acknowledgement that the drawing of boundaries is always and inevitably artificial, and invokes problems of exclusion, the advantage is that they clarify areas of inclusion. As a general problem of the RAE, the organisation around subject disciplines, with supposed clear boundaries, is fraught with difficulties. Nevertheless, once achieved, such an organisation has advantages over areas that remain loosely defined fields of study, in terms of the research assessment. This was not necessarily an argument for using disciplines as the organising principle, but merely to say that, whatever the specified rules of the game are, they should not

disadvantage those working in a field rather than a discipline. The boundaries should be equally clear for both, and with the drawing of boundaries, there should be clear specification of the 'fit' of inter-disciplinary or 'multi-disciplinary' research, that equate more appropriately to fields of practice. Leaving definitions loose would have the benefit of enabling a few idiosyncratic pieces of research to be included, at the expense of allowing the field of research to be diluted by a wide and varied interpretation of the field. A clearer definition would enable institutions to make a judgement about what falls in the continuing education category. Indeed, there was some suggestion that continuing education might itself be unnecessarily restrictive in drawing that boundary, and lifelong learning was proposed as an alternative.

Ideally, *the field itself* should determine what should count as continuing education and draw up the specification, which would then be implemented by the panel. The field should also have a say on what counts as research and assist in drawing boundaries which might, given the educational context, contribute to the blurring of teaching and research, including research for teaching as well as learning.

3. Identification of the panel

Only when the field has drawn the boundaries should the members of the sub panel be identified, as it is difficult to satisfy the issue of representation prior to determining what is to be represented in the first place. The make-up of the panel would need to reflect the range and depth of the field. Once the boundaries are agreed, then the field itself might wish to find a way of making recommendations for panel representation. Although there was some evidence of consultation for the 1996 RAE, the general feeling was that the process had not been sufficiently transparent, and there was little confidence that the panel was representative. It was particularly felt that the representation should include the newer universities, and ensure that the voice of those who actually carry out the research at the grassroots is heard. For this to be effective, the argument of the group was that this must all happen so much sooner, to enable proper consultation, and also to ensure that the specification of what counts as research is itself subject to scrutiny by the field.

4. Specifying criteria of excellence

Again, the field should be consulted on what counts as excellent research, and, having had an input into the composition of the research assessment panel, should have the opportunity to veto their specification of excellence criteria. There was a major concern with the so-called 'science model' of research and its hegemonic influence over what counts as research. Whilst this might be appropriate for some fields, it was felt that a more diverse set of criteria might be appropriate in education that included implications for action and contributed to learning, as well as to the development of teaching in practice, rather than policy-oriented research.

5. Impact and influence

A related concern was that what counted as quality research was determined by type of publication rather than its impact or influence. For example, publication in some well known, refereed journal might gain some credit for the author and the institution, even though there is no evidence that any one actually read the article, or engaged with its message. On the other hand, a conference paper that might lead to substantial public debate and discussion is discounted. In other words, a way of ascertaining the impact and influence of research is needed. This was a general problem, but also felt to be helpful if an institution or department wished to move from a grade 4 to grade 5 or from 5 to 5*. The 1996 exercise did not define international excellence. In future, indicators of impact and influence on a global scale might be a more equitable and transparent means of determining the quality of research.

Lessons to be learned and implications for future strategies

Report from the group led by Alex Withnall

Gareth Parry

This working group focused on four main aspects of the exercise: the processes involved in creating a submission; the impact of the exercise on individual departments; the definition of continuing education as a field of study; and the role of practitioner research in the education of adults.

Participants reported a variety of practices involved in composing a submission for the exercise, reflecting differences and tensions within departments of continuing education as well as between the latter and other departments concerned with education and training. There were sometimes disagreements about whether action and community-based research should be included in the exercise, with some staff unwilling to have their work with local groups and organisations assessed by an external (and possibly unsympathetic) panel. Others, including those in research-led departments, were unhappy about in-house reports of practitioner-based research being included alongside refereed articles and conventional research monographs. At the same time, individual departments had a greater or lesser say in the overall shape of the submission and in decisions about who or what was included and excluded. In some universities, a small central team of academic and registry staff exercised strong control and firm direction. In other establishments, a more devolved set of arrangements had been operated, where subject staff were expected to decide themselves whether or not to separate out continuing education in their submission.

Many of these dilemmas were to resurface with the publication of the results of the exercise. Not only was research activity in continuing education likely to experience further instability, especially where individual staff might face relocation or redefinition of their duties (or even redundancy), but it was by no means clear to some participants how the rewards of the research assessment exercise had been distributed by individual universities, particularly where continuing education had not been identified as a discrete field of research. In some institutions, the outcomes of the exercise were the basis for a fundamental review of research across all disciplines. In other establishments, the future of education, specifically initial teacher education, was already a case of concern, and the results of the research exercise were just one element, albeit a critical one, in the financial equation. However, it was not clear what the implications for departments of continuing education of a reduction or removal of teacher education might be: more profile and security or more visibility and vulnerability?

Perhaps more so with the 1996 exercise than the previous one, the issue of what might be embraced by the field of continuing education had implications both for the way institutions categorised (and justified) their submissions and for the range of expertise represented in the Education panel. The need for more clarity in these matters was a universal plea and there was general support for the

integration of continuing education within the 'home' area of education, rather than trying to search for the specificity of continuing education as a field of study. If there were to be sub-divisions within the field of post-compulsory education and training, these needed to be signalled in advance and their rationale explained. On the other hand, if no demarcations were to be recognised, then the membership of the panel had to reflect the diversity and complexity of the post-school environment, and the blurring of the divisions between formal and informal education.

The fourth and most contentious issue raised in discussion was the status of practitioner and participatory styles of research in continuing and community education. For some, these represented the essential and distinctive contribution of research and scholarship in adult education. For others, their claims to authenticity and their lack of generalisability were highly problematic, especially in a situation where the study of education in general was held in low regard inside and outside the academy. Another set of views bemoaned the either/or-ism - theoretical-practical, analytical-personal and conceptual-empirical - involved in these exchanges, and which reflected and reinforced the immaturity of the field.

Two suggestions were put forward for action by UACE, SCUTREA and SRHE ahead of the next research exercise. One was for more attention to be paid to the impact of research in continuing education. This would require a critical evaluation of the claims made for different kinds of study and different forms of dissemination. It would also contribute to more research 'conversations' taking place in a field which was dynamic and fluid, yet highly fragmented. The other suggestion was for the editors of the main journals in adult, continuing and lifelong education to be invited to discuss their editorial policies, principles and procedures - as a way of understanding how different journals construct their academic and professional territories and as a source of guidance to those preparing papers for publication.

Lessons to be learned and implications for future strategies

Report from the group led by Roger Fieldhouse

Julia Preece

There were four main points from this discussion group. The first centred around the problematic definition of continuing education as a distinctive area of activity within education. Boundaries for continuing education now range from a notion of lifelong learning to continuing professional development to any area of post-compulsory education and training - or even a suggested alternative title: further and adult higher education. There is a need to focus on what is distinctive in research on the education of adults as opposed to subject specific viewpoints. Any future RAE sub panel would have to be clearer about defining continuing education.

The second issue of concern was the lack of a definition for international and national excellence. Three interconnected points were raised in this context. Firstly, how does reputation abroad relate to 'quality'? Secondly, should different subjects be assessed differently because of differences in their research permeability in the international field? Thirdly, research in 1996 was being assessed by peers from a relatively narrow spectrum of the higher education sector; this membership could inhibit opportunities for development and exclude a much broader base for research excellence, particularly if the research population at large feels insufficiently informed about how research is being assessed. There was a strong feeling that assessment criteria must be made explicit, even at the risk of distorting the effect of future research processes in institutions.

The third, but related, point of interest was how we anticipate the future political context for the next RAE exercise. It was felt that organisations like UACE and SCUTREA should play a more pro-active role in promoting discussion about RAE criteria for continuing education research, with a view to influencing future policy.

Lastly, the question was raised as to whether everyone should enter all staff as research active. It was felt that in a continuing education context such a move would be counter-productive because of the number of people who have academic development and teaching roles, which often underpin the output of key research staff. These roles need to be recognised by the RAE as part of departments' research culture rather than downgraded.

It was generally felt that, whilst the funding allocation per RAE grade had significant impact on individual departments, the exercise was a better way of encouraging research strategies, than relying solely on a competitive project funding process.

Lessons to be learned and implications for future strategies

Report from the group led by Miriam Zukas

Alistair Thomson

1. Lessons for the funding councils

- The time period between RAEs should be extended, so that the RAE does not foster shallow research and piecemeal publication.

- The funding councils should publicise the terms and criteria of the next RAE well in advance, and they should define all criteria, including 'national and international excellence'.

- Where appropriate, specific criteria should be developed for particular units of assessment or cognate disciplines.

- The delineation of units of assessment should match changing intellectual realities, and should recognise the significance of interdisciplinary research in emerging fields.

- Decisions about the place of continuing education within the RAE must take into account the significant changes in the broad field of post compulsory education and training, and the impact of the concept of 'lifelong learning' upon connections with school-based educational research.

- The judgement of research quality primarily in terms of 'national and international excellence' should be considered and perhaps questioned; for example, these criteria might be seen to devalue research with regional impact and significance, and might lead to a centralisation of research to the detriment of the local and regional concerns which are central to much continuing education research

2. Lessons for UACE

- UACE should collect and disseminate information about the funding councils' and higher education institutions' dispersal of RAE allocations for continuing education research and researchers, both within institutions and amongst appropriate staff, and should consider the impact of the RAE upon continuing education units and researchers.

- UACE, together with SCUTREA, SRHE and FACE, should consider and articulate the changing field of research in continuing education and post compulsory education and training, and should lobby the funding councils to make appropriate changes to units of assessment and criteria for the next RAE.

- UACE should consider the polarisation of continuing education research and development and teaching and its impact upon continuing education units and staff, and should outline strategies to encourage cross-fertilisation rather than polarisation.

- UACE should ensure all its sub-committees consider the relevance of research in their work, and that research should not be the exclusive concern of the UACE research sub-committee.

3. Lessons for continuing education units in higher education institutions

- Units should continue to focus on what they 'do well' in research terms and collectively identify, assert and support a clear, distinctive and coherent research identity, which might include a set of sub-areas of expertise; a case, however, would need to be made for researchers who are engaged in individual continuing education research projects.

- Non-education researchers in continuing education units should be encouraged to develop intra-institutional links with other researchers and research units in their field.

- Conversely, continuing education units should develop links with researchers in other parts of the institution who are involved in continuing education research.

Conclusion

David Watson

The day's discussions - accurately and comprehensively recorded above - left for me four problem domains which emerged with greater force and clarity. Working on these will not only be about preparing for the next (and the first post-Dearing) RAE, possibly due in 2000 (although at the time of writing a promised funding councils' circular on the exercise has still to be issued). It will also be about the developmental agenda of the continuing education community itself.

The first problem is that of defining the internal research community itself, of 'capturing the activity' in a way that is comprehensible to others, including the RAE assessors. As the continuing education lifelong learning agenda becomes more central to the life of higher education as a whole, we have to get beyond the notion of a group consisting of 'the department plus a few isolated individuals'.

Secondly, and connected to this first point, we have to get beyond self-reference. To return to Tom Schuller, there is too much talking without worrying about who is listening. This leads to several pathologies: the dominance of the descriptive paradigm; the 'they don't understand' approach to the theory/practice interface (when it is at least as likely that we have not explained); and, perhaps most seriously, the tolerance (identified by John Field) of unprofessional publication and dissemination.

Thirdly, more than one contributor referred to a 'pecking order', of publication outlets, of funding, and of partnerships. If none of the imported ranking schemes work, we must invent, promote, and above all maintain our own. The local and the applied may well be at the heart of much useful continuing education research, but we also have to rise above these emphases to generic questions and replicable research. Incidentally this is a problem shared by some other new RAE entrants, including especially non-clinical medical research.

Finally, we cannot afford to ignore the international benchmarks. There are certain things we can measure, such as take-up of curriculum and pedagogical development. We cannot yet (as can other, more established research communities) measure who is making the real progress and break-throughs on the key research questions, because we have not yet put the brain-power into formulating these.

This seminar's discussion has, however, performed some invaluable ground-clearing.

APPENDIX A

SCUTREA SRHE UACE face

CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1996: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Tuesday, 25 March, 1997 1030 - 1600
Open University Conference Centre, 344-354 Gray's Inn Road, London

A seminar to identify key lessons from the processes and outcomes of the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise and to consider recommendations to the relevant university groups and the funding councils.

Programme

I LESSONS FROM THE 1996 RAE, chaired by Professor David Watson, Chair, UACE

Perspectives from the Education Panel: Professor Tony Edwards, Chair, Education Panel

Reflections from the Continuing Education Sub Panel: Professor John Field, Professor Elisabeth Gerver, Professor Maria Slowey

Discussion

Lunch

II CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE STRATEGY

Working groups discuss the lessons to be learned and implications for future strategies for the funding councils, higher education institutions, UACE and CVCP: Pat Davies, Roger Fieldhouse, Alex Withnall, Miriam Zukas

Tea

III CONCLUSIONS, chaired by Professor David Watson

Concluding observations from panellists

Discussion

Contributors

- Paul Armstrong, Lecturer in Adult and Continuing Education, Birkbeck College, University of London.
- Pat Davies, Director of Continuing Education Research Centre, City University, London.
- Tony Edwards, Professor of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.
- John Field, Professor of Continuing Education, University of Ulster.
- Roger Fieldhouse, Professor of Adult Education, University of Exeter.
- Elisabeth Gerver, Professor and Director of Continuing Education, University of Dundee.
- Gareth Parry, Reader in Education, University of Surrey.
- Julia Preece, Lecturer in Educational Research, Cartmel College, Lancaster University.
- Maria Slowey, Professor and Director of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow.
- Alistair Thomson, Lecturer in Continuing Education, University of Sussex.
- David Watson, Director, University of Brighton.
- Alex Withnall, Lecturer in Gerontology, Keele University.
- Miriam Zukas, Senior Lecturer in Continuing Education Development, University of Leeds.

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Research Intelligence, February, 1997 pp 8-11

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1996 EDUCATION PANEL

REPORT ON PROCEDURES

This report and the following one were written by the Panel in November 1996 and submitted to the HEFCs.

1. The Panel met eight times, with four meetings taking place in September and October 1996. Apart from several unavoidable absences before the entire timetable for the Panel's work had been agreed, there was full attendance. Glyn Davies attended most meetings as ESRC Assessor, and Paul Hubbard took part in the meeting which decided the Panel's working methods. A request from the Teacher Training Agency for observer or assessor status was declined as inappropriate, partly because its remit extends only to England but mainly because its research role and responsibilities during the assessment period were very limited.

2. The first two meetings of which was preceded by the circulation of draft proposals and issues for discussion among all Panel members, defined the Assessment Criteria and took initial decisions about working methods. Is was agreed that the Panel's collective judgements should be based on the quality of publications and other public research output, and on the cohesiveness and vitality of departmental research structures and culture. It was also agreed that departments should be asked to indicate where the evidence for claims to quality and impact was to be found, to identify explicitly the research base of teaching materials and other such published output, and not to include 'non-educational' items without explaining why they were integral or otherwise relevant to the Submission.

3. That request for clarity of presentation was partly in anticipation of a particularly extensive and complex assessment task. It was in that context that the Panel asked the Funding Councils to anticipate the additional difficulties which would be caused if there were to be large, undifferentiated Continuing Education components in many Submissions by requesting institutions to decide between including CE within their main Submission, or making a distinct Submission where it was organisationally and academically distinct. This was not done. The consequent problems are outlined in a separate report to the Funding Councils. The size and diversity of this area of research activity required a Sub-Panel of a size appropriate to a task as large as that experienced by many Subject Panels. Considerable time had to be given by the Main and Sub-Panel to defining what 'areas' CE should contain, and by their convenors to agreeing which researchers and research items should be considered by the Sub-Panel. Meeting five times, and following the procedures of the Main Panel wherever practicable, the Sub-Panel considered research in 64 institutions. A separate report on the Sub-Panel's work is attached as an appendix to this report.

4. Before its third meeting in June 1996, which preceded the availability of full statistical information, each member of the Main Panel read a large sample of RA2, 5 and 6 so that every Submission was covered in this preliminary scrutiny. Its purpose was not to begin the grading process, but to (i) identify difficulties in applying the Criteria, in particular achieving a reasonable balance between assessing sub-areas and making holistic judgements about research structures and culture, and (ii) identify whether any Sub-Panel was needed and where particular expert advice would be required. As background information relevant to that second purpose, the chairman produced a list of all the sub-areas included in the Unit of Assessment as departments had identified them.

5. The size of the task made it impossible for each member to read every submission thoroughly in the first stage of assessment. It was therefore decided to divide the Panel (excluding the convenor of the Sub-Panel) into three groups of four, each of which would consider and give a provisional grade to a third of the Submissions in each of the three stages of the main scrutiny. It was also decided that before this process began, all members of the Panel would 'grade' the same pilot sample chosen so as to include 'new' and 'old', and large and small units. This enabled critical problems and dilemmas to be considered more closely, along with the usefulness of the draft form used for recording individual assessments of sub-areas, the coherence of research organisation and strategies, the overall research performance, and identifying particular difficulties in making the assessment and areas/items needing specialist advice. These independent assessments were then circulated to all Panel members before the (fourth) meeting, at which differences in interpretation and grading were discussed and common strategies agreed for bringing sub-areas and holistic judgements together.

6. At that meeting it was also agreed to rank order instructions on the basis of the separate statistical indicators derived from the information provided by the Funding Councils. This statistical information was used as context and to suggest questions to be asked about a department's research performance; it was not used in itself as 'hard' evidence of research merit. The Panel also asked the Funding Councils to provide a summary analysis by institution of category A-E publications, and a publication count for each individual research active staff.

7. The next three meetings worked to the following pattern, based on the three group members. Each member of a group had read, before the meeting, the batch of 35 Submissions allocated to it, had made individual and independent assessments, and had sent them to other members of that group. The groups then met during the first part of the day to consider any differences in their judgements and interpretations, and to agree what recommendation to make to the full Panel. The recommendation sometimes took the form of split or borderline grades. The full Panel then heard a report from each group which identified particular and more general difficulties and dilemmas. All recommendations at this stage were provisional. Each set of Submissions was then passed to the next sub-group, together with their assessment forms (excluding any for institutions in which a member had a direct interest) which directed attention to the most problematic cases. Further cases requiring specialist advice were also identified.

8. By the last of these three meetings, all Submissions had been read thoroughly by every member of the Panel (excluding any for institutions in which members had a direct interest), a number of them several times. Advice was then available from the Sub-Panel on the many Submissions with significant Continuing Education components, and from the specialist advisers on highly specialised areas of education research, on publications which were not education research, and on publications in the Welsh language. In the plenary meeting, grades were confirmed for all those Submissions on which complete or almost-complete agreement has been reached. About a fifth of the UoA were identified as still borderline, and so as needing further scrutiny by the full Panel. Each of these Submissions was then re-read by all Panel members.

9. Before the final meeting, the Panel chair prepared and circulated a summary of the ground for each decision already taken and identified several other Submissions which needed re-consideration. At the meeting, each of the borderline cases was considered and a final decision taken.

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1996 EDUCATION PANEL

REPORT ON DIFFICULTIES AND DILEMMAS

The Size of the Task

1. The most obvious problems came from the size and diversity of the Unit. There were 104 Submissions, involving over 2800 'research active' staff. These facts explain the relatively large size of the Panel. Even so, and even with the vigorous support provided by the Continuing Education Sub-Panel, the task was exceptionally difficult. That it was manageable at all owes something to guidance from the Funding Councils which was considerably more detailed and constructive that in previous RAEs, and owes a great deal to consistently excellent support from the Panel Secretary. Nevertheless, the Panel's work was heavily 'subsidised' by the efforts of its individual members, and indirectly their institutions. The Funding Councils should recognise how large that subsidy is in relation to the biggest Units, and seek practical measures to support those Panels more substantially.

2. It is clearly impossible even to estimate the amount of reading time required between meetings. The Submissions produced about 4000 pages of what was often highly condensed text; all Submissions were read by each member, and many were read several times. Reading of publications had necessarily to be selective, and was concentrated on the more problematic items and on borderline Submissions.

Diversity and Differences in Submissions

3. The Panel had recognised from the outset not only that education research is extremely diverse in range of topic, disciplinary foundations, and methodological approach, but that many education department staff are engaged in research and scholarship in other subjects. It tried to contain the consequent problems by insisting in its Published Criteria that the relevance of such work to the Education Panel should be made explicit, as should the research base of teaching materials and other publications not obviously part of research assessment. In practice however, a great deal of published output of this kind was included without explanation. It prompted extended discussion with the RAE Manager about how such work should be treated fairly, but with appropriate regard to what a substantial amount of such work might indicate about that department's research performance in education.

Inadequate Information

4. In its Criteria, the Panel asked that it should not be expected to search for information which should have been made explicit. Many Submissions were impeccably coherent in structure and lucid in indicating where relevant evidence supporting any research claims was to be found. In almost a third however, sub-areas were not identified in RA2. There were others where it was difficult and sometimes impossible to relate publications to the areas which had been identified, or where research was 'grouped' in several different ways but without explanation in RA2 and RA5. Most irritatingly and inexcusably, there were far too many cases of information about publications being inaccurate or incomplete. in a future RAE, given the necessary condition that the software should be adequate to justify such rigour, the Funding Councils' instructions should be draconian in relation to these aspects of presentation and Panels should not be expected to undertake the searching and checking which were too frequently required on this occasion.

The Wide Scope of Research in Education

5. The difficulty of drawing boundaries around Continuing Education highlights a pervasive problem in UoA which straddles disciplinary

boundaries, included a good deal of work which is not (or is not evidently) 'education', and also included research done in other departments. It was difficult at times not to think that 'all human life' was within in the Educational Panel's remit. Certainly some Submissions seemed to have been used in parts as a hold-all for work which defied any clear categorisation.

6. Continuing and Adult Education also presented particular problems, beyond the sheer size and diversity of the Education 'area'. Departments varied widely in the extent to which they identified it as a distinct research area, or marked it off from other research into higher or post-compulsory (16-19) education. While parts of some Submissions, and almost all of several lay clearly within the remit of the Sub-Panel, there were others where the relevant research was assessed by both the Main and the Sub-Panel.

Holistic Judgements and Sub-Areas

7. The Council's criteria were predominantly about the quality of research in sub-areas. The Panel experienced great difficult in defining and maintaining a balance between rating such areas (where they had been defined); taking into account the coherence of research strategies, the strength of organisational support, and the vitality of research culture; and arriving at holistic assessment of departmental research performance. Some Submissions did not identify sub-areas because no grouping of research activity was evident. Others failed to substantiate those which had been claimed, or identified them inconsistently. There was little correlation between the size of the Submission and the number of sub-areas. This caused problems where (for example) very large sub-areas lacked obvious intellectual coherence, or aroused suspicion that they might be a means of covering inadequate work with a layer of excellent research.

National and International Excellence

8. Panels were advised by the Councils not to define 'international and national excellence' in their published criteria. The advice is indicative of the difficulty of handling these concepts, yet it must be problematic for the definition of research ratings to be based so largely on two undefined qualities. Before a future Research Assessment Exercise, it would seem appropriate for the Funding Councils to engage in thorough enquiry into how these concepts, and especially 'international excellence', might be defined across the academic spectrum. Certainly the Education Panel was aware from the outset of particular difficulties in education research much of which is directed at national policies and problems and is not readily transportable.

Criteria for Final Grades

9. The Councils' criteria for the final grades were both minimal in what they referred to and quantitatively prescriptive. Particular difficulties were experienced with grades 1 and 2. As formally defined, the proportion of research of national standing justifying no more than grade 1 extended from 'none' up to 'almost nothing', and that meriting grade 2 from 'almost nothing' to 'up to half'. Grade 2 was therefore much too broad. The split between 3a and 3b made better sense, and hindsight suggests a stronger case for refining the lowest grades.

Conclusion

10. Finally, there was a very positive dimension to the size of the Panel's task. The amount of research recorded, the coherence of many departmental research strategies, and the frequent commitment both to theoretical development and to deepening the research base of professional practice evident in the best Submissions, were impressive.

We would like to express our appreciation to Professor Michael Bassey, Editor of Research Intelligence, for permission to issue these reports.

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RESEARCH INTELLIGENCE Number 60 April 1997

RAE 1996: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SUB-PANEL ON CONTINUING EDUCATION

Elisabeth Gerver

This paper is intended to complement the reports of the Education panel on their processes and difficulties in the 1996 RAE (in the previous Research Intelligence). After a formal account of the procedures used by the sub-panel on Continuing Education, the paper highlights several difficulties which the sub-panel experienced.

1. Membership and meetings

The Continuing Education sub-panel consisted of five members: Professors Frank Coffield, John Field, Elisabeth Gerver, Maria Slowey and Richard Taylor. The sub-panel was convened by Elisabeth Gerver, a member of the Education panel. At all stages of the process, members were excluded from all consideration of any institutions in which they had expressed a direct interest.

The sub-panel met five times: 28 June, 29 July, 1 October, 8 October and 23 October. All meetings were fully attended except that one member was unavoidably absent from one meeting. The secretary to the Education panel ably serviced all meetings, and the final meeting was also attended by the chairman of the Education panel.

Throughout, the sub-panel worked under the authority of the main Education panel, and reported to all meetings of the latter from July onwards. It reported its interim and final recommended grades to the meetings of the main panel on 16 October and 31 October. The main panel took these reports into account in determining the ratings.

2. Definition and selection of continuing education

The funding councils' guidance for the RAE did not request institutions to identify continuing education in their submissions, nor was a definition of the term supplied. After substantial discussion in both the main and the sub-panel, the Education panel agreed that the sub-panel should advise on "continuing education" defined as including:

- higher/further/adult and continuing education (excluding 16-19);
- professional development/training (mainly excluding teacher training);
- management education (mainly excluding school management);
- education/training/employment beyond 16-19;
- continuing education in other countries;
- all continuing education publications in foreign languages;
- community education and community development, except where it is youth and/or schools focused;
- health promotion, where it appears to be primarily directed at adults.

For the purposes of identifying the work to be considered, "continuing education" also included subject specific research by those individuals in continuing education units or departments who were returned under "Education".

For each submission, the chairman of the Education panel and the convener of the sub-panel agreed a list of the names of, and publications numbers for, each individual cited in RA2 who appeared from RA5/6 and/or RA2 to have published work in continuing education in selected institutions. The 64 institutions chosen were those for which the RA2, 5 or 6 explicitly mentioned continuing education and/or which mentioned departments of continuing education. The list excluded those submissions with a minuscule amount of CE (less than 5%).

3. Processes

As far as possible, the sub-panel adopted the methods used by the main panel. After agreeing its

working methods, the sub-panel undertook its own pilot exercise to clarify the definition of continuing education, to help to define common standards, to test the checklist and to identify possible problems.

During the course of the exercise, all members read all the submissions or sections from the submissions referred to the sub-panel. Two teams, selected by the convener on the basis of members' complementary expertise, each initially read one half of the submissions and agreed proposed grades for the meeting of the sub-panel on 1 October; members also lightly read the submissions assigned to the other team. Reports on the outcomes of selected reading were sent to the appropriate team, in so far as the publications could be obtained. Between 1 and 8 October, all members reconsidered all submissions about which any doubts had been expressed; between 8 and 30 October, submissions about which a final grade or rationale was in doubt were further scrutinised.

For the meeting on 8 October, the convener prepared a spreadsheet noting provisional grades and rationales for all institutions about which provisional agreement had been reached. This spreadsheet was refined on 23 October and subsequently by consultation with the sub-panel. All recommended continuing education grades and comments were agreed by all members. Continuing education grades remained confidential to the main and sub-panels and were not made public. The sub-panel agreed reluctantly that, because of the large number of submissions, it could not provide any feedback to institutions.

4. Evidence used

In reaching its recommended grades, the sub-panel primarily considered the evidence available in RA2, 5 and 6 (including the results of audit); members' knowledge of individual pieces of research; the results of a limited amount of selective reading; and the specialist advice available. The sub-panel placed less emphasis than the main panel on research culture both because the main panel was already assessing such evidence and because institutions had not been requested to provide specific evidence about their research culture in continuing education. Statistical analyses of submissions were considered only as an indication of possible questions to be addressed. Members of the sub-panel did not take into account private information about institutions, such as staff and other changes since the census date.

5. The handling of continuing education

The blurred boundaries of research in continuing education, post-compulsory education and education as a whole create intrinsic difficulties in handling continuing education research. While the funding councils did not request institutions separately to identify Continuing Education in Education submissions, the Education panel established a sub-panel on Continuing Education which then had to disaggregate submissions. Three main problems resulted:

- the lack of any clear guidance to institutions about what constitutes continuing education: the parameters of the definition agreed by the Education panel were, perhaps, wider than some institutions would have anticipated;

- the fragmentation of institutional submissions: it was extremely difficult to assess individuals and institutions when the individual researchers submitted often included both education and continuing education amongst their publications; in several cases, almost all the researchers in certain submissions identified as containing continuing education had only one or two continuing education publications each;

- a serious delay in the sub-panel's assessment of submissions, caused by the need to identify which parts of which submissions it would consider.

In subsequent RAEs, we believe that either a separate panel or a sub-panel on post-compulsory education and training should be appointed, with sufficient members and expertise to consider submissions in post-compulsory education and training; if a sub-panel is established, its members should be appointed at the same time as those of the main panel. Institutions should be asked to identify any work in post-compulsory education and

training, including continuing education, which they would wish to be assessed as such.

6. The inclusion of non-education research in submissions

The sub-panel discussed at length with the RAE team the problem of the handling of non-education research submitted to the Education panel. Some institutions, whose continuing education departments contained non-education researchers, had abstained from submitting non-education research to the Education panel because of the published criteria; often their non-education research was not submitted to other panels because it did not fit the research profiles of the relevant university department.

Other institutions chose to submit non-education research to the Education panel but varied in the extent to which they argued an explicit and/or plausible case for the inclusion of such research. The sub-panel sought specialist guidance from other panels for those institutions which submitted non-education research as part of their continuing education research. In the case of one institution, non-education research amounted to nearly 40% of the continuing education part of the submission and required specialist advice from eight different panels.

The resultant problems were these.

* Those institutions whose non-education research was assessed in the terms of the RAE guidance, despite the Education panel's published strictures against such submissions, may have gained an advantage over those who did not submit such research to the Education panel.

* Because of the need to consult specialist advisers, non-education research publications may have received more intensive scrutiny than education research publications.

We believe that, in subsequent RAEs, the published guidance should state even more explicitly than in 1996 that non-education research is ineligible for submission to the Education panel unless, exceptionally, an explicit and compelling case is made for its inclusion (eg as part of a major strategy to break down disciplinary boundaries).

7. Publications

A total of 1420 publications was cited in the 64 submissions considered by the sub-panel. This volume of publications, combined with the volume of the forms themselves, meant that assessments had to be based on prior knowledge of the research, scrutiny of the RAE forms and the reading of a limited number of selected publications.

The RAE team had requested sub-panellists to try to obtain copies of cited publications from institutional libraries and, if necessary, interlibrary loan. Extensive time and substantial costs were incurred in adhering to this request. Difficulties were exacerbated by the already limited period of time available for scrutinising the submissions. Problems in obtaining publications were created by many institutions' submitting incomplete details of their publications, as well as by substantial numbers of cited continuing education publications not being in the public domain or being in relatively obscure journals.

We believe that in subsequent RAEs, the number of people appointed to each panel and sub-panel should be proportionate to the number and size of submissions which are likely to be received. The necessary copies of publications should be provided directly by the institutions concerned.

8. Effects of the census date for researchers

The requirement for institutions to cite publications only for those researchers in post on 31 March, 1996, created problems in assessing the achievement of institutions over the period from 1992 to 1996. The problems were particularly acute when senior researchers had changed institutions during 1995 and 1996, thereby enabling their new institutions to gain the predominant credit for their achievements at their previous institutions. The logical consequence of such a procedure would have been to assess institutions' research potential, but we were required not to do so.

We welcome the funding councils' awareness of such difficulties. We hope that, in future, submissions will enable institutions to gain full recognition of the work of each researcher in post during even part of the period since the previous RAE, if necessary by an appropriate division of the work cited.

Conclusion

Despite these issues, members of the sub-panel warmly welcomed the opportunity to assess the quality of research in continuing education and we wish to express our appreciation of the very able support which we received from the excellent administrative staff involved in the exercise. For us, the 1996 RAE confirmed that continuing education - broadly defined as covering most of post compulsory education and training - is an important and large area of enquiry. We continue to believe that, in future, judgements about research quality must continue to precede any decisions about the selective funding of research in higher education institutions.

Education Panel

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Assessment Criteria

Defining research

1. The diversity of research in education, in content and methodology, requires the Panel to be flexible in marking the boundaries of work relevant to the Research Assessment Exercise. For example, curriculum, teaching, and assessment materials may be included where these are based on, or developed through, research and have been published. The inclusion of such items should be justified explicitly in submissions in relation to the underlying research. It is the quality of that research which will be assessed.

2. Basic, strategic, and applied research will all be given careful consideration. Where appropriate, submissions should make clear what the department's priorities have been. In addition to work which develops theoretical understanding, a great deal of research in education is intended to shape policy and improve practice. The quality of research will often be demonstrated through its influence on other researchers working in the same field, or on policy makers and practitioners. Evidence of such influence will be taken into account, although the Panel recognises that it can take time for impact to be observable. Submissions should also identify research which the department regards as 'cutting edge' theoretically, substantively, or in methods of investigation.

3. The Education Panel will not be competent to assess that work in Continuing Education which has no significant 'education' dimensions (for example, which is exclusively in archaeology or literature). Such research should therefore be submitted wherever possible to other relevant subject panels. The Education Panel will create a Sub-panel to consider the Continuing Education components of submissions where these are substantial. Two members of the main Panel with research experience in post-compulsory education will be joined for this purpose by three specialist advisers.

4. The Education Panel also expects to be asked by some other subject panels to advise on research-based work which has particularly strong pedagogic dimensions. .

Quality of research activity

5. The Education Panel's collective judgements will be based primarily on

a. the quality of publications and other forms of public research output (the assessment of which is described in paragraphs 11-14 below).

b. the vitality of the department's research culture, and how its research is promoted, organised and monitored.

6. Careful attention will be paid to accounts in RA 5 and RA 6 of the department's research structures, priorities and strategies, and of how its research achievements are perceived in that context. It should therefore be made clear where in the submission evidence supporting these statements is to be found. Submissions should also refer explicitly to significant divergences from the research plans submitted in 1992, to new research directions, and to future plans. There may be good reasons why earlier plans have not been fully implemented, and changes should be explained in terms of the department's current research structure and strategy. The Panel should not be expected to infer what should be made explicit.

Note: These criteria should be read with the general statement (including definitions) at Part 1 of the Circular.

7. Taking care not to read-off quality from quantity, and to normalise quantifiable data so as not to penalise small departments, the Panel will also consider:

a. Research funding.

Evidence of research income will be related to other parts of the submission. Particular note will be taken of grants gained through competitive, peer-reviewed procedures. It will be helpful if individual grants are explicitly linked in RA6 to the relevant research sub-area. Institutions are encouraged to explain how their research income may be used as an indicator of research productivity and quality.

b. Research students and studentships, and higher degrees completed within the assessment period.

Research carried out by research students can represent a significant component of a Department's overall research activity. Evidence of the quality of this work, and the support given to it through training and other resourcing, will therefore be taken into account. ESRC recognition will be one of the indicators used to assess this part of an institution's profile. The number of research students will be treated cautiously as a performance indicator because of regional and locational differences in the likelihood of recruiting them.

Research-active staff

8. In arriving at its overall grades, the Panel will place individual achievements in the context of all of the work submitted. It may be appropriate in some submissions for the apparently low productivity of a researcher to be explained - for example, where the research has a long lead-time or is subject to constraints against early publication - or to indicate where promising but as yet inexperienced researchers have been recruited. The Panel will also take into account how staff are encouraged and supported in their research and how their research skills are developed.

9. The Panel will show no general preference either for breadth of research activity or for concentration on a few research areas. The nature of that choice and reasons for it should however be made clear in the submission.

10. Where established researchers have been recruited close to the census date, the Panel will take into account whether they are reinforcing an already active area of research or represent a new departure. Where a department has recently recruited numbers of established researchers, the Panel will consider what this indicates about previous research record and its research strategy. The contribution of recent appointments to the research output of their former institution department will also be taken positively into account in the assessment of that institution.

Assessing the quality of publications

11. The Panel will undertake some selective reading of publications.

12. Positive consideration will be given to the dissemination of research findings in professional journals and related media, where the emphasis is on communicating them to practitioners and/or contributing to policy discussion. Where cited publications are of this kind, it will be important for submissions to indicate clearly their relationship to the underlying research and to how the quality of that research can be assessed.

13. No general rule will be applied to ranking books, book chapters, papers in refereed journals and papers in refereed conference proceedings because their relative significance differs between different areas of research in education. Editorship of books will only be counted as a significant publication where it has involved a substantial research role (for example, in having co-ordinated and contributed to the research programme being reported). Editorship of academic journals may be included in RA6 as an indicator of academic esteem. As indicated in paragraph 1, published curriculum, pedagogic and assessment materials (including textbooks) will be taken into account only where these have a strong research base.

14. The Panel recognises that co-authored publications may provide valuable evidence of inter-disciplinary research, and of research teams working collaboratively within or across institutions. It may be helpful to highlight the contribution of research-active staff to such publications where that contribution has been substantial. It will not be assumed that fewer than four publications is in itself an indication of lower academic output.

Sub-areas and their international/national excellence

15. Submissions should make clear how the Department views its research and assesses its research strengths, thereby providing a context for evaluating the extent and quality of its research activity. The Education Panel has therefore tried to avoid outlining a single model for submissions in setting out its criteria, and is aware that departments will vary in how they organise their research. Nevertheless, the grading criteria are framed in terms of sub-areas. It will therefore be helpful if submissions indicate clearly on RA1 and RA2 what those sub-areas are, and (where appropriate) group the researchers working within them on RA 1 and RA2. Listing individual researchers alphabetically will be appropriate only where each is seen as representing a distinct sub-area. The Panel recognises that some individual researchers will have contributed to more than one sub-area, and that their publications will be distributed accordingly

16. While a single grade has to be produced from the grading of sub-areas, the Education Panel will aggregate its judgements so as not to lose sight of the department's overall research performance, strategy and culture.

17. Identifying international excellence poses problems in an area where much research (e.g. in policy, or curriculum innovation) has particular national significance. International recognition may also reflect the topicality of research but not necessarily its quality. The Panel will therefore exercise care in interpreting such indicators of international recognition as active involvement in research networks, consultancies, and keynote contributions to conferences/seminars.

18. In assessing national excellence, the Panel will keep in mind differences between the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish contexts, the distinctiveness of some systemic features and developments, and the importance of some country-specific journals and other publications.

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Working Methods

19. Despite the anticipated high number of submissions to the Education UOA, the Panel has agreed that each member should read all submissions in the first stage of its assessment and make a provisional evaluation. Among other advantages, this will provide the opportunity to identify submissions, or parts of submissions, on which specialist advice will be needed, or which may need to be sent to another subject panel, or which may require the creation of a further Sub-panel. It will also identify submissions requiring advice from the Continuing Education Sub-panel. The recommendations of that sub-panel, like those of any other sub-panel which may prove necessary, will be discussed by the full Panel. All judgements of parts of submissions will be incorporated within the overall judgement of research performance, strategy and culture of the department being assessed.

20. Each submission will then be reviewed by a sub-group of not fewer than three, with some cross-moderation between the groups. Submissions about which there is disagreement or uncertainty at this second stage will be referred to the full Panel. Once an agreed provisional listing has been established, all borderline submissions will be considered again by the full Panel before gradings are finalised.

APPENDIX E

1996 Research Assessment Exercise: The Outcome

To	Heads of HEFCE, SHEFC, HEFCW and DENI funded Institutions Bodies invited to nominate RAE panel members
Reference	RAE96 1/96
Publication Date	December 1996
Enquiries to	HEFCE - RAE Team (0117 931 7315) (or by e-mail: rae@hefce.ac.uk) SHEFC - Richard Hancock (0131 313 6587) (or by e-mail: rhancock@shefc.ac.uk) HEFCW - Ann Hughes (01222 682 221) DENI/NIHEC - John Coote (01247 279 333)

PART I: BACKGROUND TO THE RATINGS

Summary

1. This circular contains the results of the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), conducted jointly by the four higher education funding bodies in the UK: the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI). All higher education institutions (HEIs) funded by these bodies were eligible to participate in the exercise.

2. The form and conduct of the exercise, described in Circular RAE96 2/95 (November 1995), are summarised briefly below. A more detailed account will be published in March 1997. For ease of reference the definition of research adopted for the exercise is set out at Annex A to this circular; and the descriptions of the subject units of assessment (UOAs) at Annex B. Annex C gives the rating scale used across all subjects, and some guidance on interpreting the ratings which are set out in Part II.

3. The funding bodies will use the ratings to inform the distribution of grant for research to HEIs from 1997-98. Their arrangements for the funding of research, and the grant allocations, will be announced separately in due course.

4. This exercise is concerned only with the assessment of research quality. Separate arrangements exist for assessing the quality of teaching in HEIs.

Conduct of the Exercise

5. Assessment was by informed peer review, with 60 subject panels considering submissions for assessment in 69 UOAs. Membership of the assessment panels is listed in Circular RAE96 2/96. The panel members were selected, following nominations from learned societies, subject associations and other interested bodies, on the basis of their eminence and experience as practising researchers in their field. Some also had experience of commissioning and using research in commerce and industry.

6. Submissions were made in writing and in common form for all subjects. They included:

a. The names of the active researchers, working at the HEI on the census date (31 March 1996), whose work it had selected to put forward for assessment in that UOA.

b. Details of up to four publications or other forms of research outputs produced by each of these researchers during the specified period (1 January 1990 to 31 March 1996 for humanities and arts subjects; 1 January 1992 to 31 March 1996 for other subjects).

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c. Information about numbers of research students and studentships in the department, and its research income, during the assessment period.

d. A statement of the department's research achievements, arrangements for supporting and promoting research, indicators of external recognition, and any other relevant information that the HEI wished to draw to the attention of the panel.

7. The definition of research used in the exercise (Annex A) was broad and inclusive. It encompassed the full range of basic, strategic and applied research, including work relevant to industrial, business, and other users of research, with no distinction in esteem between them. Research falling within the definition and leading to outputs in forms other than published texts was also admitted. The exercise covered the full range of academic subjects, and was designed to accommodate interdisciplinary and other research not falling clearly within a single traditional subject definition. HEIs themselves decided within which UOA a particular researcher or group of researchers should initially be submitted.

8. The assessment panels met first in 1995 to agree their individual criteria for assessment and working methods. These were published, with detailed guidance on submissions, in November 1995, some six months before the closing date for submissions. (Circulars RAE96 2/95 and RAE96 3/95.) The criteria statements varied in detail, reflecting the panels' differing views on what was the key evidence for research quality in their subject and on the relative significance of different parts of the submissions. However, all assigned particular importance to the panel's collective judgement of the quality of research being done in a department and reported in the cited outputs.

9. The deadline for return of submissions was 30 April 1996. The panels met again between May and November of that year to make the assessments in accordance with their criteria statements. Their members read selectively from the research outputs listed in the submissions. Wherever they felt it necessary to ensure a full assessment, they sought the advice of other panels, or of outside specialist advisers, on particular aspects of the research described in a submission.

10. A total of 2,896 submissions for assessment were received from 192 HEIs across the UK. These listed 55,893 individual active researchers.

Checking and Audit

11. The submissions were subject to checking and audit. In virtually all cases the data were returned to the funding bodies electronically, using software developed for the exercise. Once the information had been entered in a database, printed copies were returned to HEIs to check that it had not been corrupted in processing and was free of serious errors of fact. The submissions were then audited. A sample were selected for routine audit checks - for example, to verify that staff returned as research active were indeed employed as academic staff by the HEI on the census date. All submissions underwent a number of mechanical checks for detectable inaccuracy or internal inconsistency. Finally, a number of questions raised by the panels about the factual accuracy of individual submissions were taken up with the HEIs concerned. The outcome of all of these checks was reported to the panels as necessary.

12. The checks revealed that the submissions contained a number of minor inaccuracies, and a smaller number of quite significant errors, but in no case was there evidence to suggest deliberate misrepresentation or widespread misunderstanding of the guidelines.

Ratings

13. The ratings are listed by unit of assessment. They should be read with the notes on interpretation at Annex C. In some cases an HEI, with the prior agreement of the funding bodies, made more than one submission to a particular UOA; in such cases each submission was given an

individual rating. A small number of ratings for submissions made jointly by two HEIs are identified as such.

14. The ratings are followed by a series of charts showing a research quality profile for each HEI. There is also an index identifying all the UOAs in which each HEI made a submission.

Comparability of 1992 and 1996 Ratings

15. The rating scale used in 1996, reproduced at Annex C, maps directly onto the scale used in 1992. The definition of the scale points is the same as in 1992 except that point 5 on the 1992 scale has been extended to create a new 5* rating, and point 3 has been subdivided into points 3a and 3b. Nonetheless, comparisons between the ratings awarded in 1992 and 1996 should be made with some caution. In some cases the definition of the subject units of assessment has changed; and an HEI may have chosen, as a result of staff changes or for other reasons, to submit different groups of researchers in the two exercises within the same UOA.

Comparability within the 1996 Exercise

16. Within the 1996 Exercise, considerable stress was laid on the need for a common approach. In particular this meant all panels interpreting the rating scale in the same way, and adopting criteria which were different only where subject-related considerations clearly required it. This should mean that the 1996 ratings are comparable between subjects. However, these judgements have been made in different subjects by different panels against different criteria and it would therefore be unsafe to assume that what a particular rating indicates about a department is the same across all subjects.

Appeals

17. There is no provision for formal appeals against ratings.

Further Copies of the Ratings

18. The ratings are available electronically (http://back.niss.ac.uk/education/hefc/rae96/). Further copies in book form are available from External Relations, HEFCE (telephone 0117 931 7339, fax 0117 931 7463) or from Research Funding and Policy Branch at SHEFC (telephone 0131 313 6560, fax 0131 313 6501) priced at £15. This copy may be photocopied freely, but the individual ratings or tables should always be presented in the context of the note on interpretation at Annex C.

Further Enquiries

19. Further enquiries should be addressed to:

HEFCE - the RAE Team (0117 931 7315)
(or by e-mail: rae@hefce.ac.uk)

SHEFC - Richard Hancock (0131 313 6587)
(or by e-mail: r.hancock@shefc.ac.uk)

HEFCW - Ann Hughes (01222 682 221)

DENI/NIHEC - John Coote (01247 279 333)

Annex A
Definition of Research

'Research' for the purpose of the RAE is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry, as well as to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship*; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It excludes routine testing and analysis of materials, components and processes, eg for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques.

* Scholarship embraces a spectrum of activities including the development of teaching material; the latter is excluded from the RAE.

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Theory and practice of Education at all stages including pre-school, school, post-school, continuing, further, adult and higher education, but not physical education and sports sciences (see UOA 69). Where the nature of the research justifies it, work may be submitted to other units (eg certain types of mathematical education might be more appropriate to mathematics).

The Rating Scale

5*	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of international excellence in a majority of sub-areas of activity and attainable levels of national excellence in all others.
5	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of international excellence in some sub-areas of activity and to attainable levels of national excellence in virtually all others.
4	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in virtually all sub-areas of activity, possibly showing some evidence of international excellence, or to international level in some and at least national level in a majority.
3a	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in a substantial majority of the sub-areas of activity, or to international level in some and to national level in others together comprising a majority.
3b	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in the majority of sub-areas of activity.
2	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in up to half the sub-areas of activity.
1	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in none, or virtually none, of the sub-areas of activity.

Notes

1. The concept of a 'sub-area' of research activity is applicable to the work of individual researchers as well as to that of groups. A sub-area is a coherent sub-set of a unit of assessment, and could refer either to the research of a group of staff in a submission, for example high energy physics in a submission from a physics department, or to the disparate research interests of an individual, for example an individual studying both cosmology and high energy physics. The sub-areas relate only to the individual submission and will vary between submissions.

2. 'Attainable' levels of excellence refers to an absolute standard of quality in each unit of assessment, and should be independent from the conditions for research within individual departments.

3. The international criterion adopted equates to a level of excellence that it is reasonable to expect for the unit of assessment, even though there may be no current examples of such a level whether in the UK or elsewhere. In the absence of current examples, standards in cognate research areas where international comparisons do exist will need to be adopted. The same approach should be adopted when assessing studies with a regional basis against 'national' and 'international' standards.

4. For the Research Assessment Exercise, 'national' refers to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Unit of Assessment: 68 Education

Education Panel

Institution	1996 Rating	Proportion of Staff Selected	Category A Research Active Staff (FTE)	Flagged Research Groups
Anglia Polytechnic University	3b	F	10.5	
Aston University	3b	A	5.8	
University of Bath	5	B	22.0	
Bath College of HE	2	E	11.0	
University of Birmingham	5	A	63.1	
Bretton Hall	2	D	10.4	
University of Brighton	3b	D	31.0	Multiple Literacies; Higher Education Management
University of Bristol	5	B	50.2	
Brunel University	3b	D	25.0	
University of Cambridge	4	A	31.0	
University of Central England in Birmingham	2	E	22.0	
University of Central Lancashire	2	E	4.0	
Central School of Speech and Drama	2	E	2.0	
Canterbury Christ Church College	3a	E	20.8	
Cheltenham and Gloucester CHE	2	C	23.4	
Chester College of HE	1	F	5.1	
Chichester Institute of Higher Education	2	D	24.3	
City University	3b	D	4.2	Access to Education
De Montfort University	2	D	25.4	
University of Derby	1	F	2.0	
University of Durham	4	B	39.3	
University of East Anglia	5	B	25.5	
University of East London	3b	D	23.7	
Edge Hill College of HE	2	E	19.9	
Institute of Education	5*	B	140.0	
University of Exeter	4	C	70.2	
Goldsmiths College	4	B	32.4	
University of Greenwich	3a	E	23.5	
University of Hertfordshire	3b	D	19.2	
Homerton College, Cambridge	3a	B	57.8	School Improvement and Processes
University of Huddersfield	2	D	22.5	
University of Hull	3a	C	25.0	
Keele University	3a	B	16.5	
King Alfred's College, Winchester	2	E	9.0	
King's College London	5*	B	35.2	
Kingston University	2	E	12.1	
Lancaster University	5	A	22.0	
La Sainte Union College of HE	1	F	1.0	
University of Leeds	5	B	74.3	
Leeds Metropolitan University	3b	D	18.4	
University of Leicester	3a	C	30.0	Primary Education
University of Lincolnshire and Humberside	2	B	11.0	

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NOTE: This table should be read in conjunction with the Notes on Interpretation at Annex C

Unit of Assessment: 68 Education

Education Panel

Institution	1996 Rating	Proportion of Staff Selected	Category A Research Active Staff (FTE)	Flagged Research Groups
University of Liverpool	3a	C	18.0	Science Education
Liverpool Hope College	1	E	6.0	
Liverpool John Moores University	3a	E	13.8	
Loughborough University	3b	B	18.0	
University of Manchester	4	A	83.5	
Manchester Metropolitan University	3b	D	69.0	
Middlesex University	3b	D	24.3	
Nene College	3b	F	3.3	
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	5	C	30.0	
Newman College	1	E	13.5	
University of North London	3b	D	20.0	
North Riding College	1	E	5.0	
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	3a	F	7.0	
University of Nottingham	4	C	50.0	
Nottingham Trent University	3b	E	15.0	
Open University				
A - Education	4	C	75.1	
B - Educational Technology	5	B	50.0	
University of Oxford	5	B	18.1	
Oxford Brookes University	3b	D	21.6	
University of Plymouth	3b	E	16.0	
University of Portsmouth	2	D	21.0	
University of Reading	3a	B	98.2	
Roehampton Institute	2	B	73.1	
College of St Mark & St John	2	E	10.0	
S. Martin's College	2	E	10.3	
University of Sheffield	5	A	38.4	
Sheffield Hallam University	3a	E	37.0	
University of Southampton	4	C	29.6	
South Bank University	2	F	6.0	
University of Sunderland	2	D	19.0	
University of Surrey	4	A	20.8	
University of Sussex	4	B	33.4	
University of Teesside	1	B	10.0	
Thames Valley University	2	A	5.0	
Trinity & All Saints	1	E	8.0	
University of Warwick	4	A	86.8	
Westhill College	2	D	19.0	
Westminster College, Oxford	2	C	34.2	
University of West of England, Bristol	3b	D	26.5	
University of Wolverhampton	1	D	41.3	
Worcester College of HE	3b	D	14.0	Early Childhood Education
University of York	4	B	12.9	
University of Aberdeen	4	B	6.0	
University of Dundee	3a	D	7.0	

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NOTE: This table should be read in conjunction with the Notes on Interpretation at Annex C

Unit of Assessment: 68 Education

Education Panel

Institution	1996 Rating	Proportion of Staff Selected	Category A Research Active Staff (FTE)	Flagged Research Groups
University of Edinburgh	4	A	13.3	
University of Glasgow	3a	D	13.3	
Heriot-Watt University	3a	B	15.4	
Moray House Institute of Education	3a	D	30.5	
Northern College of Education	1	C	87.0	
University of Paisley	1	F	4.0	
St Andrews College of Education	2	F	12.9	
University of Stirling	5	C	17.6	
University of Strathclyde	3b	D	114.0	
North East Wales Institute of Higher Education	2	E	4.0	
University College of North Wales, Bangor	3a	D	11.2	
University of Wales, Swansea	3a	B	32.2	Special Educational Need and School Attendance
Swansea Institute of Higher Education	1	E	6.0	
University of Wales, Aberystwyth	3b	C	14.0	
University of Wales, Cardiff	4	B	22.1	
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff	1	E	14.0	
The Queen's University of Belfast	4	C	16.0	
University of Ulster	4	D	28.0	

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NOTE: This table should be read in conjunction with the Notes on Interpretation at Annex C

1996 Research Assessment Exercise
Membership of Assessment Panels

To	Heads of HEFCE, SHEFC, HEFCW and DENI funded Universities. Bodies invited to nominate RAE panel members
Reference	RAE96 2/96
Publication Date	December 1996
Enquiries to	HEFCE - RAE Team (0117 931 7315) (or by e-mail: rae@hefce.ac.uk) SHEFC - Richard Hancock (0131 313 6587) (or by e-mail: rhancock@shefc.ac.uk) HEFCW - Ann Hughes (01222 682 221) DENI/NIHEC - John Coote (01247 279 333)

Summary

1. This circular updates the list of members of subject assessment panels for the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), originally published in July 1995 as circular RAE96 1/95. It incorporates all changes in membership that have taken place since July 1995.

Background

2. Following consultation with the sector in November 1994 some 1,000 bodies (subject associations, learned societies, professional bodies and organisations representing users of research) were invited to nominate members of assessment panels for the 1996 RAE and to comment upon the structure and subject coverage of the panels.

3. The panel chairmen, who had been appointed by the four funding bodies in late 1994, were then invited to use these nominations to recommend panel members. In doing so, they were asked to take the following into account:

a. The research experience of nominees and their standing in the research community.

b. Their own knowledge of the pattern of research and of active researchers in the subject area.

c. Any proposals for the structure and subject coverage of panels made by the professional bodies and associations.

d. The need for continuity and the willingness of previous panel members to serve again (although no member could serve in more than three RAEs consecutively).

e. The need for users and commissioners of research - in commerce, industry and the public sector - to be represented (after taking into account the participation of specialist 'assessors').

f. The need for panel members to have a collective knowledge of research activity throughout the UK and in a range of institutions.

4. On average, one third of panel members and about half of panel chairmen from 1992 served again in 1996. This circular contains the final panel membership list.

Role and Operation of Panels

5. The chairmen and members of each panel were invited to participate as individuals, not as representatives of a particular group or interest. They accepted responsibility for providing two formal outcomes: statements of criteria for assessment and working methods, which were published in November 1995 as Circular RAE96 3/95; and the assessment ratings, published in Circular RAE96 1/96.

6. During the assessment process, some panels established sub-panels, which included people who were not members of the main panel, to advise on the assessment of work in sub-areas within their subject. This decision, and the selection of additional sub-panel members, was made by the panel and its Chairman. Annex A lists the sub-panels.

7. In all cases the sub-panels worked within the criteria for assessment determined by their parent panel.

8. Some panels referred parts of submissions that fell outside their areas of collective expertise to other panels or external specialists for advice. This included cases where submissions contained work of a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary nature.

9. Final responsibility for recommending ratings to the funding bodies rested with the main panel members alone.

10. Many of the panels had 'assessors' appointed by bodies with a major interest in the research funding in their subject area - including the research councils, government departments, the medical research charities and certain professional bodies. The assessors did not share in the direct responsibilities of the panel described in the previous paragraphs. Their role was to assist the panel by bringing a wider perspective to the discussions, and by advising on the research grants awarded by their bodies.

11. Each panel was assisted by a secretary who was a member of staff of one of the four higher education funding bodies.

■

Responses and Enquiries

12. Any enquiries about panel membership or conduct should be addressed to:

HEFCE - RAE Team (0117 931 7315)
(or by e-mail: rae@hefce.ac.uk)

SHEFC - Richard Hancock (0131 313 6587)
(or by e-mail: rhancock@shefc.ac.uk)

HEFCW - Ann Hughes (01222 682 221)

NIHEC - John Coote (01247 279 333).

13. Further copies of this circular can be obtained from the HEFCE (telephone 0117 931 7339, fax 0117 931 7463, e-mail hefce@hefce.ac.uk). They can also be obtained from the Research Funding and Policy Branch at SHEFC (telephone 0131 313 5650, fax 0131 313 6501). This Circular is also available electronically at NISS via JANET at: http://back.niss.ac.uk/education/hefc/rae96/

Education Panel

68 Education

Professor A D Edwards (Chairman),
University of Newcastle upon Tyne

Emeritus Professor M Bassey,
The Nottingham Trent University

Professor S A Brown,
University of Stirling

Professor J Calderhead,
University of Bath

Professor R Deem,
Lancaster University

Professor R H Driver,
King's College London

Professor M E Gerver,
University of Dundee

Professor Caroline Gipps,
Institute of Education

Professor G J McCulloch,
University of Sheffield

Professor R J L Murphy,
University of Nottingham

Professor K M Perera,
University of Manchester

Professor A J Pollard,
University of Bristol

Professor Sally Tomlinson,
Goldsmiths College

Assessor

Economic and Social Research Council,
Mr G Davies

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Ms Maureen Masson - SHEFC

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